

SCHLOSS AND TOWN

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2086.

SCHLOSS AND TOWN BY FRANCES MARY PEARD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SCOTCH AND TOWN BY FRANCIS HART LAMON

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BY

FRANCES MARY PEARD,

AUTHOR OF

"THE ROSE-GARDEN," "CARTOUCHE," "MOTHER MOLLY," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1882.

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SCHLOSS AND TOWN

BY

FRANCIS MARY THARD

WITH AN

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR, "THE SCHLOSS AND TOWN"

COMPANY LIMITED

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

LONDON

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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SCHLOSS AND TOWN.

CHAPTER I.

THAT little Nuremberg episode effected one thing: it showed Carmichael where he had been drifting during those pleasant weeks and days. Many another man might have found it out more quickly, but Dick had always been capable of shutting his eyes, and letting the stream take him so long as he saw no positive reason for fighting against the current. Here he had gone along very placidly, but he had now awakened to the conviction that drifting would no longer content him. He could not stay for ever at Rothwald. And he had grown to want something more definite than even the charm of Wanda's companionship.

Something of this he said to Rudolf on the evening of his return. "Then what do you mean to do?" asked the young man abruptly. He and Carmichael were smoking in front of the house.

"I shall go straight to the point," said Dick, "and ask her if she will marry me."

"And what will Lord Heynham say?"

"My father won't interfere, so long as I don't come upon him for money. That's the worst part."

"What?"

"That she has such a lot of money. Nothing would bore me so much as being a rich man."

"Except being a poor one," said Rudolf with a laugh. "Try it."

"Oh, I know all about that. My dear fellow, do you suppose I have had no experiences? I have always managed to rub along, but it has been with an uncommonly short stock of sixpences."

It seemed to Rudolf that it would take too long to explain that this bachelor existence, in which no one but himself suffered from any failure in the sixpences, had nothing in common with the poverty which was in his mind. Instead of doing so he looked at Dick in his steady fashion, and said earnestly:

"You are a lucky fellow!"

Dick reddened.

"Stop a bit. You don't know yet that she will have me."

"I meant because you were independent, and could go your own way without hamperings. As to

Fräulein Wanda, I know her father is anxious that she should marry. Oh, she will have you."

Rudolf, as he said this, had the air of uttering a truth which it cost him something to assert. Dick brightened up.

"You think so?"

"Yes," said the other briefly.

"I shall try my fortune to-morrow. I can't hang on your hands for ever, and when this is settled, you will go back to England with me?"

"I don't see anything better that I can do."

"Nothing half so good. Of course there are fifty things that you can fall into there, or if you don't fall into them, there are my father and plenty of others to push you."

"One will content me."

"Oh, you need have no anxiety."

"*Schön*," said the young Baron in a deep satisfied voice. He had a singularly simple trust in his friends, and no fear of their failing him. He told himself that he was rejoiced at the conversation, ignoring a certain pain which had made itself felt. Any prospect of action pleased him, for his present life was singularly irksome, chiefly on account of his father's attempts to conceal the condition of affairs from the world and himself. Painful as it might be, Rudolf could have faced the

knowledge that the yards and outbuildings were let, that the few servants became fewer, that rooms were closed, and his mother undertook labours which were new to her; but the only thing to make it bearable, or so it seemed to him, would have been an open and frank sympathy between them, and this there was not. It was all hushed up, silenced. The result was the building of a barrier between those who dearly loved each other, and an oppression in the house which Rudolf felt unendurable.

The next morning Carmichael went early into Lauterthal. He had an ostensible excuse, for Wanda was to have the drawing of the Schloss, but how to find the girl alone was a problem which he trusted to fate to solve. The Saal was empty, but Frau Meyer in her untidy morning wrapper presently appeared.

"Wanda is in the garden," she said, "pulling it to pieces. It is a ridiculous waste of time and money, but her father spoils her, and of course my wishes are entirely disregarded."

Dick murmured something in excuse of his princess, and then boldly asked if he might seek the Fräulein in the garden.

"You may go if you like. She is independent

of me, and I presume Frau Schmidt is with her," said Frau Meyer crossly.

But Wanda had disposed of her companion, and was in the heart of her labours; two or three men were with her, altering, digging, arranging.

"It is not the right time of year," she called out triumphantly to Dick, "but I could not let it stay ugly all these months. And now you shall give me your advice. I want a garden as nice as the Professor's. I want all his roses. I want the same atmosphere of peace, with just——"

"With just?"

"With just a touch of something which he had not. I hardly know how to explain it, but I think it all lay a little too clearly before one. There were no odd corners, there was no mystery. I don't know how to say what I mean," she repeated impatiently, "but you must understand, because it is in your pictures, and they have made me expect it."

Dick looked round him radiantly.

"Oh, you can have it here," he said. "You can get an outlook from your garden which the Professor had not. I should fling up a grass bank against that wall—you don't want it to be so high on this side—then, if you conceal it craftily with shrubs, you will see the church——"

"And the Rothwald woods," said Wanda slowly. "Do you know I am miserable this morning."

"Miserable! Why?"

"My father has bought Baron Rudolf's mare."

"Don't you like her?"

She made a quick gesture.

"He must be so sorry to part with her. Oh, Herr Carmichael, you are his friend; could you not persuade him to take her back?"

"Hardly, if she suits you."

"That is not the point," she said, almost angrily; then lowering her voice, "Is it really true what they say? Are the Von Tellenbachs so poor?"

Dick stared for a moment, startled by her words and by some sharp thought. "Do you mean——" he began.

"I mean that people say so, and if Baron Rudolf is obliged to sell Miranda, when I know he was so fond of her—oh, I think it is dreadful!"

She stood with her head turned away from Dick; he could not see that there were generous tears in her eyes, but a dull pain made itself felt in his own heart. He understood it so little that the consciousness that it was there irritated him; it was like an unbidden and hateful guest, whom he would willingly have ejected on the spot, and

yet before whom he felt himself powerless. The Von Tellenbach fortunes counted for little at this moment, except that they were in some odd way stirring and agitating Wanda, and obliged him to allude to them. At any other time he would have taken her words more keenly to heart.

"I don't imagine things can be so bad," he said slowly. "I hear nothing there to make me think so, except—yes, it is true that Rudolf wishes to find some employment, and that he is going to England with me. That alone might incline him to dispose of Miranda."

Wanda shook her head.

"It must be a great trial to him, and we—we are the last people to have her."

It began to irritate Dick yet more that he must work round to his subject through Rudolf.

"I think he is fortunate to have anything he cares for in your hands," he said boldly. Wanda looked round at him and then smiled.

"That speech is no comfort to me," she said. "Well, Nuremberg was very successful, was it not? Now you ought to see some of our Bavarian Tyrol."

"But I am going to England."

"You, too! And my father going and all! Pray, who will be left in Lauterthal for me to speak to?"

"If I could think you cared a straw whether I went or stayed," began Dick with eagerness.

"I care very much," said Wanda frankly. "I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose one of them. Why must you go away?"

She spoke kindly, yet something in her words bitterly disappointed poor Dick.

"That is for you to decide," he said in a choked voice. He was conscious that she suddenly looked at him, and then began to walk quickly away, and then he detained her.

"Don't you know how it is?" he said. "Any place where you are would be paradise for me, Wanda. Sometimes I have dared to fancy——"

She interrupted him quickly.

"You should not fancy."

"Not so much as the possibility that you might one day love me?"

"No. I could not, indeed!" She turned towards him without looking at him, and then suddenly put out her hands. "Oh, what has made you say this!" she cried. "I am so grieved! If you had spoken to my father, he would have told you. Please forget it all."

"Forget! That is as impossible for me as you say the other thing is for you," said Dick, speaking quietly, but holding her hands in his and looking

at her. "But I am to have no hope. Is that your last word, Wanda, and will you give me no reasons?"

"Oh, I can't, I can't!" cried the girl inconsequently. "I have no reasons except that I know it can never be. That is my last word, indeed. Do not say any more!"

"No, I will say no more."

"Let things be just as they were before."

"So be it. Down go the castles, but one may pretend they are as firm as ever. Well, I will do my best."

She had drawn away her hands, and he was standing a little before her facing the Rothwald woods. The next moment he had turned round and was holding out his hand.

"It is all over, isn't it? and some day you will know better than to fancy that things can remain the same. At any rate, it will take a finer fellow than I am to feel all his hopes swept away from under him and yet make no sign. But you'll not see it—so much I can promise you. Good-bye, *mein Fräulein*."

She scarcely knew afterwards how much or how little she had answered, or what kind of farewell she had spoken. A rush of bewilderment and sorrow seemed to carry her away; he was gone be-

fore she realised that she was not to see him again, and the remembrance of the pain in his face and voice, as it came upon her, seemed to be reflected in her own countenance. One of the men who were working came up to her and asked a question. "Would the gracious young lady," he began, and then stopped open-mouthed, for Wanda was neither looking at nor listening to him. She had been altogether taken by surprise. She had liked Carmichael, but he had scarcely had a separate existence in her thoughts, where he had rather made a part of Rothwald, and been looked at as merged in its inhabitants. Somehow or other, and perhaps unconsciously, it had interested her to hear of them, and poor Dick had been the medium.

Rudolf, with Oscar by his side, was working away at a tumble-down fence. The dog had nearly recovered from his wounds, but was already uneasy and troubled at the loss of his companion, Miranda. He lay in the road with his nose buried between his great paws, but his ears lifted and watchful for the slightest sound. There was a slight weight in the air, a lazy droop of the leaves; beyond Lauterthal, its houses and its canal, the wide uninteresting plain stretched itself along until a misty horizon received it. Rudolf was working vigorously; he was thinking of Carmichael, but

neither saw nor heard him coming, and Dick had been standing behind him for some minutes before he looked round and became aware of his presence. He was not wishing for it at that moment, and a frown crossed his face. But it cleared away, and he said quickly:

"Well, *mein Bester*, and how have you sped?"

"Don't ask me," said Dick with a groan. "All the love-smitten asses at whom I have laughed a hundred times might have their revenge, if they only knew it. How on earth does one manage to be such a fool! Come, Rudolf, here's a question for your philosophy."

"My philosophy, as you call it, ambles along too soberly to be a match for your flights. Come down to facts, and tell me what has happened."

"You might guess. A man does not call himself a fool when he has got what he has set his heart upon. There's your answer. Now be a good fellow, and help me to get off quietly to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow?" questioned Rudolf. "I am going with you, remember."

Dick hesitated.

"Look here," he said, "you won't mind my speaking plainly, will you?"

"I shall mind if you don't."

"Well, then, the truth is, I don't feel like going back to England. I daresay it's a mistake, and that it would not be worse there than anywhere else; but something in me rises up against it. I've been hard hit, I suppose, and I would rather be in a place where I shouldn't be running against men and women I know. I've a great mind to go north, and work round to Denmark."

Dick, as he said this, had crossed his arms on the fence, and was leaning over it. Rudolf felt as if his own schemes had been shaken to their foundation, but an unaccountable lightness of heart made him say cheerfully:

"My dear fellow, go wherever you think is best. Of course I shall find you wanting, but I shall manage to rub along."

Dick eagerly assured him that his absence would make no difference. He would write to his father, to a dozen others. Lord Heynham would give him a bed in Cadogan Place, there would be crowds of people in town, and something would be sure to turn up in a week or two. To all this Rudolf listened attentively.

"I am afraid it looks shabby," said Dick suddenly, at last. "But I don't think I could face all those people."

"I should be very sorry for you to do it on my

behalf," said the other, smiling. "Oh, I shall get on, as you say."

"You've never said you're sorry for me," Dick said, gloomily.

"I'm horribly sorry for you. But the truth is, I can't be altogether sorry that you're not going to marry Fräulein Wanda."

"Why?"

"Why? Somehow I don't consider you are suited to each other."

"Oh, that is ridiculous," Dick said, impatiently. But after a pause, he added: "All the same, I'll tell you, if you care to hear, why she wouldn't have me, and why you suppose that we should not suit?"

"Well, tell me," said the young Baron, fixing his eyes on him with some curiosity.

"It's my belief you each of you like the other, in spite of what you say."

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning Dick went. He had walked away after that parting shot, and nothing more had been said between the friends on the subject, the proposition seeming to Rudolf too absurd to be combated. He missed Dick, but was glad he was gone, because he wanted so much to go himself. He had made up his mind to start in two days. His mother prepared his clothes silently, his grandmother strongly reproached him for leaving them, and his father, as was usual, took alternate sides.

"I shall never see him again," said Madame de Beaumont. "I don't mean that I am going to die; but I shall not see him, nor anything else long."

"Dear mother," interrupted the Baroness, "Dr. Reichmann particularly charged you not to let your mind dwell upon such gloomy possibilities."

"Dr. Reichmann gives admirable advice, *ma chère*," said her mother-in-law, smiling; "but even his medicines are easier to take, and that is saying a good deal. Well, I do not in the least understand what Rudolf intends to do, and I am doubt-

ful whether you know much more about it. Perhaps it is as well. He will do nothing that is unbecoming a Gréville."

"He will do nothing that is unbecoming himself," said the mother proudly.

Madame de Beaumont looked at her, still smiling, and then put her hand on hers suddenly and kindly.

"You are right, Elisabeth. That is better, and I am a vain old woman, who by this time might have learnt to be different. We may trust Rudolf."

"Oh, yes," said the Baron, a little irritably. "We may trust him; but—he might so easily have married Wanda Meyer."

"Hush!" said his mother, putting up her hand. "He was perfectly right. That alone would have convinced me that he had a fine instinct."

While this was said about him Rudolf was walking into Lauterthal. He was thinking, as they were, of what he had done and was going to do, but it may be doubted whether his own judgment on his actions was so favourable as his grandmother's. He had very grave doubts whether he had not made a fool of himself. It had irritated him beyond measure to be disposed of in the fashion which his father had arranged, yet, if he had been left to himself, he might very likely have

been drawn in that same direction. His mind always found itself in some decided attitude towards Wanda. It might be dislike, it might be curiosity, it might be admiration, it had never once been indifference. He had listened willingly enough to Dick's expansive outpourings while they were confined to Wanda's excellences, but when Carmichael expatiated on his own sentiments, he became aware more than once that his friend was frowning disapprovingly. He was just conscious of a sort of contradictoriness which he might have found humiliating if he had pursued it to the end; there is, in fact, an invariable irritation in discovering that we are in two minds about any matter, and undecided as to which we wish to get the upper hand. Just now, for instance, he was in doubt. After his last visit to the Meyers he had resolved not to go there again, yet he was half inclined to bid them good-bye. He thought, carelessly, that when he reached Lauterthal he would decide.

Once there, he walked slowly through the narrow streets until he reached the drawbridge, which had just been raised in order to allow a vessel to pass beneath, and he not unwillingly stood still in order to watch the bright little scene. It was a gray and still day, every now and then breaking into cheerful gleams, with strong high

lights in the clouds. Colour was never wanting in the lumbering vessels which were dragged through the canal; the one which was now passing had an emerald green rudder, and a splash of scarlet on the deck. A strong white horse was standing still, attached to the towing-rope; men were pushing, pulling, hauling, a dog was barking; then the vessel moved slowly on, the bridge creaked into its place again, and all the excitement was over. Rudolf was free to pass, but he still remained leaning against the posts; there was a dreamy bustle which it amused him to watch, a satisfaction in seeing the curves of disturbed water settling into their usual glassy composure, and the broken reflections resettling.

Suddenly he heard the steps of a horse close to him, Oscar bounded joyfully forwards, and looking up he saw Wanda on Miranda. The instant that she recognised the young Baron, she grew crimson, and her first impulse was evidently to pass with no more than a bow. But Miranda had also seen who was standing there, and had no such intentions. She pricked her pretty ears, whined, and showed a determination to stop, which must have caused a struggle between herself and her rider, had not Wanda, feeling that this would have been undignified, yielded. Nothing could have

been more annoying to her. She had resolved not to ride Miranda while her former owner remained in the place, and had only yielded because her refusal had greatly vexed her father, and when she was so near losing him, she could not bear to show opposition. But her unwillingness was plainly written on her hot cheeks, and Rudolf could not avoid a little feeling of amusement when Miranda insisted upon coming close to him and pushing her soft nose into his hands. Oscar was leaping about her in delight.

"I am very sorry, *mein Fräulein*, that meeting with me should have so demoralised Miranda. Generally she is obedient enough, but apparently she has not yet mastered one of the lessons of life—to forget old friends."

He said this with his eyes twinkling but his lips grave. At any other time Wanda would have felt justly angry at so unfair a reflection, but she had not regained her self-possession and could not retort. To her ineffable annoyance she even felt her voice tremble as she said:

"She will never learn that lesson with me."

"No?" questioned Rudolf.

"No!" repeated Wanda more firmly and even angrily.

"Then at least you must teach her to conform

to her new ones. Shall I give you a few hints as to her character?"

Wanda looked round uneasily. She would gladly have escaped, but could only murmur, "If you please."

"She is obstinate, then, as you have just seen," he said smiling. "You must persuade her when you want your own way, or the contest may be awkward. You see I am beginning with her faults."

"But all this, as you say, I have seen," said Wanda trying to recover herself.

"*Schön*. Then, next, she is proud and resents the whip."

"Perhaps she is proud in another way, and will resent her present quarters after the Rothwald stables."

She said these words with a sudden sharpness, and Rudolf looked at her in wonder.

"There is no occasion for crediting her with imaginary faults," he said, lifting his eyebrows. "No doubt she will be better off with you, and if she cannot get us out of her head all at once, you must have a little patience. She is as full of tricks as a kitten. She will pick my pocket, and carry my handkerchief for a mile without hurting it. You will get very fond of her in time."

"It seems that the question is whether she will

ever get fond of me," said Wanda still sharply. He smiled.

"You need not fear. If I might venture to offer a word of advice, it would be that you should ride her almost altogether on the snaffle. You have a light hand, but she will then go more pleasantly. You like her long sweeping action?"

If Wanda had spoken the truth, she would have said that at this moment she detested everything that had to do with Miranda, but she murmured something to the effect that her action was excellent.

"You need not fear any more unpleasant encounters," he went on still smiling, "for to-morrow I leave Lauterthal for some time."

She coloured again without answering. Rudolf continued:

"I was going to your house in order to take leave, but now I will ask you to make my excuses to Frau Meyer, and to accept my best wishes."

He took off his hat and walked away, but he had not gone many paces when he heard her voice behind him, tremulous with the effort:

"Baron Rudolf!"

He immediately turned round, and Miranda seized the opportunity to come much closer to him than her rider liked. But she went on bravely.

"As we have met, I should like to say that I hope you will be happy about Miranda, and rest assured that we shall take care of her. My father has given very special directions. And, if ever you wish to have her again, you have only to claim her. We understand that you part with her because you are going away, but pray remember that at any future time, if you want her again, she is yours."

Earnestness had overcome Wanda's embarrassment, and there was something so kind and so womanly in her words and manner, that Rudolf could not but be conscious of a pleasant sensation as he listened. He said warmly:

"Thank you a hundred times, *mein Fräulein*. Whether I stayed here or went away I must have sold her, and believe me that I am rejoiced to know that she has fallen into such hands. She is worthy of a kind mistress. Be good to her, Miranda," and, as he said this, he kissed the mare lightly on the nose.

"You are going away to-morrow?" asked Wanda, in a low voice.

"To-morrow. I am going to England to try to make my fortune," he said with a smile. "Will you wish me good luck?"

"Yes, indeed," she said wondering.

"I am a poor man, Fräulein, and it is necessary."

"If you are a poor man," she said, with a vague feeling that he wanted consolation, "you have a great name."

"I begin to question whether that is such an advantage," said Rudolf a little bitterly. "It brings with it many restraints."

"But none that should not exist," said Wanda eagerly. "It must add to and not take away from your power of doing what is right."

He repeated her words slowly while he patted Miranda's glossy neck.

"What is right?' Well, what do you say, *mein Fräulein*? Is it right to run counter to those who have the most claims on one's affection and respect?"

"I do not know," she said troubled. The hot colour rushed into her face. "Yes, sometimes I think it is," she went on, trying to speak firmly.

Rudolf's thoughts were far enough from the road on which hers travelled. He was thinking of what lay before him, and of his father's dislike to his seeking work. He was silent, but presently looked up, and said frankly:

"I am glad you are of that opinion, and I should like to ask you to keep it in mind when my mother talks to you. Will you do this for me?"

"I!" exclaimed Wanda startled. "It is not likely I shall ever see your mother."

"I hope so," said Rudolf earnestly. "I hope you will sometimes let Miranda have her own way and carry you to the Schloss. It will be a kindness, for I fear this winter will be a dreary one for them all. My grandmother is almost blind."

The girl hesitated. Some full depth in his voice touched her more than she realised, but she doubted being an acceptable visitor at the Schloss. Rudolf looked at her without saying more about the matter. Presently he added smiling:

"There is one other thing. I will give orders, but when I am gone I am afraid no mortal power will keep Oscar out of your stables. It is a very inconvenient friendship at this moment."

"Oh, he may come whenever he likes," exclaimed Wanda warmly. "I have always felt that I had something to do with his misfortunes and that I owed him compensation."

"*Also!*" said Rudolf merrily. "Oscar, do you hear? That is a fortunate delusion for you, my friend."

"And," added Wanda shyly, "if you really think I should not be—unwelcome, I will go sometimes to the Schloss."

"I was sure you would," said the young Baron in a satisfied voice. It struck her that he must have made certain of her intentions upon grounds

of which she was not herself aware, but the idea did not displease her. She, however, felt that it was time to break off the conversation, especially as it now seemed to be ending in silence. She offered her hand rather quickly, "Good-bye!" said Rudolf, holding it for a moment in his own, "or rather, will you not say '*Auf Wiedersehen*'?"

"*Auf Wiedersehen*," said Wanda readily, but colouring again. As she turned and rode away, followed by the groom, Rudolf's eyes went after her. She had a slight, well-proportioned figure, and she rode remarkably well. As he looked the young man began to be conscious of the revulsion his feelings had experienced since the day before, when he had sent Miranda to Herr Meyer's. He was now glad that she belonged to Wanda. "*Auf Wiedersehen*," he softly repeated to himself, smiling. When he had watched her out of sight, and himself had turned back into the Rothwald road, visions of work and success, of independence, and home-coming, trooped through his brain, and somehow Wanda's face, and the girlish inflexions of her voice, came and went among them. He had no regrets for the past—which he felt repugnant alike to him and to her—but, beyond doubt, the future had gained a new interest.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day Rudolf went, and before a week was out Herr Meyer had also departed. Summer was then at its highest, and Wanda complained that it was hard to have its charm destroyed, but until he left her she had hardly known how much of the brightness of her life would go with her father. It could not be exactly said that there was a change in its outward conditions, but it more than once occurred to her, as the days and weeks went by, that a network of vexatious restraints which seemed no bigger than cobwebs, and yet had all the fret of sharp cords, was being woven round her. The changes in the garden were finished, Dick's mound made, but it had been done at the wrong time; there was a good deal of brownness, and little beauty, and Wanda already repented her impatience. The place had lost much of its interest. She half wished she had persuaded her father to let her spend the time of his absence at her old English school, but fond as she was of

him, before he left her she had not realised how dreary home would seem.

Herr Jacob did not trouble her much. He spent more hours at the Works than his brother had done, and at meals or in the evening, though his rasping "Yes, yes," constantly irritated Wanda, and though he showed no signs of affection or even interest, he rarely took the trouble to oppose her. It was different with his wife. She had never disguised her open dislike of Wanda; indeed, the feeling had been so openly expressed that it had passed into a kind of jest among them. But what had been only a source of amusement while her father was at her side, became vexatiously different now. There were a hundred little ways in which Frau Jacob could daily thwart her, and she showed a decidedly malicious talent for not suffering any of these ways to escape her. Nothing is so minute but that it will in time create a sore.

Nor did Frau Schmidt prove of much help. She was a person whose inclination would lead her to side with the strongest. Here she had not yet made up her mind as to who would prove the strongest in the end, but a coarseness of perception inclined her to the one who most loudly asserted herself. She saw that Wanda often yielded instead of combating a point, and not understanding that

this was brought about by a mixture of pride and indifference, set it down to weakness, and drew a little closer to Frau Jacob.

Wanda spent much time alone in the garden. She disliked the people whom her aunt invited to the house, and the gossip which generally fastened its claws upon the Von Tellenbachs. The little Lauterthal world was not averse from pulling its great people to pieces, and spreading abroad the economies which the poor Baron flattered himself to be carefully hidden in his green Rothwald woods. No one would have thought about them but for this anxious hiding and shutting out of sympathy. The pride, not the poverty, was resented. Wanda was too young to understand this, or to feel anything but hot anger, when some little incident was tossed about and delivered over to general laughter at the *Kaffee*. She defended it, was laughed at herself, and sat with burning cheeks vowing she would come to *Kaffee* no more.

"Let us make a subscription and send the Baroness a new bonnet," said Minna Henschel, as loudly as the sweetmeat she was sucking would allow.

"Yes, indeed, I never go to church without wondering whether we are still to see that old brown thing," said the Frau Generalin affectedly.

"It has quite a depressing effect upon my devotions. Herr Lieutenant, do you not agree with me?"

"Oh, altogether!" he said, laughing loudly at the supposition.

"Then suppose we open a list."

"You may put me down for fifteen marks," said Frau Meyer eagerly.

"Oh, of course, you distance us all."

"So generous!" murmured Frau Schmidt.

"I shall give a mark," said Minna, helping herself again from the sweetmeat tray. "Come, Wanda, you have been staying there; we shall expect you to do a good deal."

"If you expect me to jest at misfortunes which you might have learnt to respect, you are mistaken," said Wanda coldly and haughtily. Her words fell like little morsels of ice; the Frau Generalin put up her hand as if to shield herself.

"Help, everybody!" she exclaimed, looking at the Lieutenant, who stood with his mouth open staring at Wanda. "Wanda is up on her heights and preparing to freeze us all!"

"Wanda will be good enough to remember what is due to my guests," said her aunt angrily. The girl looked straight before her and did not answer; her face was pale, but her eyes were sparkling.

The Herr Lieutenant, who recognised something of the justice of her indignation, and had suddenly discovered her to be beautiful, said awkwardly:

“After all, the *gnädiges Fräulein* is right, and it is mean to laugh at people’s misfortunes. Nobody knows what may happen to any of us one day.”

“Speak for yourself, Herr Lieutenant,” said the Frau Generalin sharply. “Whatever happens, I am sure I shall not inflict such a bonnet on my friends.”

There were other scenes like this, and they were not likely to enhance Wanda’s popularity among the women, or to bring her down from her heights of scorn over the *Kaffee* gossip. It made the others the more angry, and gave Wanda no pleasure that the young Lieutenant, who was large and stout, with an innocent round face and stubbly hair, began to develop a strong admiration for Fräulein Meyer. He was continually coming to call and paying lengthy visits, that he might entertain Wanda with an account of his performances at bowls. She tried to be kind to him, and sometimes listened so patiently that he thought she was interested, and became more than ever descriptive. But at such times her mind would be far away, and it was when she looked the most wearied of the conversation that she was really the most attentive.

Her absence from or presence at the *Kaffee* were equally sure to give offence to her aunt. Frau Jacob had no confidence in her own conduct in society; she did not feel at ease there, and imagining Wanda to be on the watch for mistakes, hated, as she said, to feel her at her elbow. But, on the other hand, she treated her absence as an insult. Her feelings towards Wanda were far more active in their movements than Wanda's towards her, so that she laid to her charge a hundred acts and thoughts of which the girl was innocent, keeping her mind pertinaciously fixed upon her. Wanda, on the contrary, thought of her as little as possible, finding the subject unpleasant, and seeing no reason why she should ponder over what was disagreeable.

One evening, about a month after her father's departure, and when she was beginning to expect news from him, she was walking slowly up and down in the garden, trying to extract what pleasure she could from her surroundings. For a few minutes her thoughts reverted with a little puzzled disgust to certain bitter speeches which her aunt had flung at her without visible cause of offence, but she presently tossed them aside as too petty to be dwelt upon. Nothing could be more small or despicable than to meditate upon spiteful sayings,

or to feel them stirring you towards saying the like, and Wanda steadfastly set herself against such stirrings.

But a strong sense of loneliness swept over her, and she looked forward to the monotony of the coming months with many misgivings. The Rothwald woods lay dark against the quiet sky, above them a planet was shining steadily. Wanda's thoughts, which began to be conscious of the need of brotherhood and sympathy, leapt forward to the sense that there, too, in those woods, were hearts heavy with the weight of separation and sorrow. All her ideas about the Schloss were strangely modified; perhaps her rejection of the proposed marriage had been sufficient to soothe her wounded pride, and defending them from the taunts of Frau Jacob had enlisted her on their side, for she felt no more of her old resentment. There was even a sort of sweetness in reflecting on what Rudolf had asked her to do, though shyness had as yet held her back from Rothwald. But if it were only to please Miranda, go some day she must. And were things really as bad with them as these people declared? There was no one whom she could ask, though Martha, the old servant who had lived with them longer than Wanda's own lifetime, had hinted at it more than once. Herr Carmichael had not

seemed to be aware that anything was much amiss. Poor Dick! It was the first time her thoughts had reverted to him that day. A woman is often impatient with the wrong man who loves her, without intentional harshness regarding him in the light of an interruption. She had liked him, and was vexed that the liking had not satisfied him. She valued his friendship, but was startled and perhaps sceptical when he went further. Nevertheless Dick, had he but known it, had one triumph. She could never pass one corner of the garden and not think of him, and on this particular evening when she reached it she stood still looking away into dim mysterious distances, which the moon was beginning to silver faintly. The heat of the day had passed; a little air, cooled by dew, touched her cheek as softly as a kiss, and scarcely stirred a cluster of white roses which had climbed a tree and flung themselves, as though in frolic, from its branches. All sorts of tender thoughts come in the moonlight. Wanda, standing there, a white figure in the darkness, felt them stealing into her heart, felt sad and yet comforted by the solemn thrill with which night greets us, the distances she reveals. Her frets and impatiences seemed so small, and unnecessary that she could hardly conceive herself to have yielded to them: now they were far away,

Heaven was near—then came a break, a heavy step on the gravel—

“My very dear Wanda, are you there? Your aunt begs you will not remain out longer.”

It was Frau Schmidt’s voice, a little disturbed. Wanda turned hastily:

“My aunt?”

“You must understand, my dear, that it is a strange fancy of yours to like to be here so much by yourself—of course, I can sympathise with the sentiment, for I adore this soul-elevating moonlight; but, at the same time, I can appreciate her anxiety. She fears it might not have pleased your excellent father——”

Frau Schmidt paused uneasily. Wanda had thrown back her head with a little action she knew too well.

“Did she desire you to express her anxiety?”

“She begged me to induce you to come in,” said the other, deftly clothing Frau Meyer’s curt words in a more attractive dress. “You must perceive for yourself, dear Wanda,” she went on, “that in your father’s absence much trying responsibility remains with your excellent aunt.”

One of the small annoyances which Wanda experienced at this time rose from a growing inclination of Frau Schmidt to use affectionate and familiar

endearments. She shrank from them, feeling only a cold repulsion when they were showered upon her, especially when Frau Schmidt professed herself her aunt's mouthpiece. The anger in her eyes made itself heard in her voice as she said:

"Do not alarm yourself on that account. I am able to answer to my father for my own actions."

"Oh, that is true, my dear child," said Frau Schmidt hastily. "But, only consider, you might fall ill, and then he would certainly blame your aunt and me for not having taken better care of you. Indeed, my best Wanda, you should be reasonable!"

"I am quite reasonable," Wanda replied looking coldly at her. "You and Frau Meyer know that I am always accustomed to walk here in the evenings. May I beg of you to tell her so?" But as Frau Schmidt, in some dismay, was preparing further persuasions, the girl suddenly turned and began to walk rapidly towards the house. "Never mind," she said, "I will go in."

There were many of these scenes. Wanda was generally rebellious, but showed it in different ways. Sometimes she flamed into passion, more often yielded from the feeling that it was not worth while to be angry, an indifference which her aunt and Frau Schmidt interpreted as proceeding from

quite another source. They did not penetrate to the fact that her shame, when she was betrayed into loss of temper, was the more bitter because she felt a contempt for their small tyrannies, and that it seemed to her disgraceful to be angry with those who for one cause or another were dependent upon her father. She knew—without knowing particulars—that her uncle Jacob and his wife were under deep obligations to him, and this knowledge became a perpetual reproach if she allowed hasty words their way. It was a delicacy which coarser minds would be unable to realise, so that it was little wonder if Frau Schmidt were convinced that Frau Jacob was stronger than her niece, and would gain and keep the upper hand in the house. It said something, however, for her opinion of Wanda's generosity, that while thinking thus she had a conviction that, were it otherwise, she could without difficulty trust to the girl's forgetfulness of the present time.

No such conviction came to Frau Meyer. She knew and knew thoroughly, that all her best interests were endangered by her treatment of Gottfried's daughter, but an impulse which she called irresistible, pushed her on in spite of herself and of prudence. Taunting words would not be kept back when she had once found that they could sting

Wanda into passion, or drive the colour out of her cheek, and turn her into marble by some sneer which obliquely touched her father or the Von Tellenbachs. The girl might not have thought so much about them but that her aunt took a course which kept them constantly uppermost, and almost forced her to be their defender. And as, though the two things need not at first be identical, we nearly invariably end by siding with those whom we defend, Wanda, solitary and unhappy, began to rank herself, her father, and the Von Tellenbachs, as standing together and alone in opposition to those whom she disliked.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Baron was too pertinacious a man to have given up his idea, or at any rate his regrets over it. If his wife and mother-in-law had been blessed with less patience they must have wearied at his perpetual allusions, for he had persuaded himself that nothing and no one was answerable for the downfall of the family fortunes except Rudolf—thanks to his refusal to marry. When he saw Wanda in the distance he sighed. When Oscar was missing he would say that dogs were wiser than their masters. The Baroness did not contradict him: she listened quietly to his continual harpings upon the desirability of the marriage with Wanda, and equally constant wonderings whether if this or that were to happen it might not yet be arranged. If Wanda were to go to England? If Rudolf were to come home? If he—the Baron—were to do this or that? A continual stream of possibilities flowed through his mind. Frau von Tellenbach listened, knitted, said “Precisely!” at intervals, and contrived to a certain degree to check

her husband's fervour, by that ingenious process known to wives alone.

But to carry a principal point, there are minor points which must be yielded. The Baron, who had the feelings of a gentleman, and felt grateful to Herr Meyer for the unexpected manner in which he had received his communication, remembered that something had been said about Wanda coming to Rothwald, and harped upon it until his wife said cheerfully:

"By all means, Hermann; indeed, I think you are quite right. The Meyers behaved very properly, and it will be but neighbourly to show a little kindness to the girl, particularly now that her father is absent. Some day before long we will invite her to come here."

The Baron rubbed his hands.

"To be sure, to be sure. Then you can write to Rudolf and praise her up."

"We will see when the time comes; there is no particular hurry," said Frau von Tellenbach evasively.

Nevertheless, it was no surprise to her when her husband said that very evening, with a slightly embarrassed air:

"I met Fräulein Meyer riding to-day, and thought I might as well ask her to come here to-

morrow afternoon. I know you particularly wished her to be invited."

"Did I?" said his wife dryly. But then she added, smiling: "Yes, I am really glad that you have fixed a time."

Wanda, as she rode slowly up the hill, found herself wondering that she should have come. The Baron's invitation would never have brought her without those words of Rudolf's, of which she had not forgotten one. But though a little doubtful and uneasy about her welcome, she was in high spirits. It was exceedingly hot, but heat was delightful to her, and when they had crossed the canal and were mounting the hill, the great chestnut trees threw shade enough to prevent the sun from doing them any harm. As they passed the spot where she had dragged Frau Schmidt out of the wood, she laughed aloud at the remembrance. Then she thought of her father, began picturing to herself what he might be doing at that very moment, sure that she would not long be absent from his thoughts. She counted the days, and told herself that very soon a letter would come; nay, she could almost guess the words it would contain. Since he had left her she had not felt so happy.

Frau von Tellenbach must have been a less kind woman than she was not to have felt drawn

towards the young girl who, with sparkling eyes and brilliant colour, stood in the doorway of the room, a little uncertain how to advance. The freshness and bright youth about her were in themselves an irresistible charm, and there was a shy appeal in the attitude which pleased the Baroness. She at once rose to meet and to kiss her.

"You are very welcome," she said kindly. "Here is Fräulein Meyer, *Mutterchen*, come to bring us a breath of young life. It is what we had begun to feel we wanted, is it not?"

"Ah!" said the old lady brightening, "I am glad she has come. Can I see her, I wonder? Place her in the light, Elisabeth, and let me try to make out something more than a dim shape. No," she said presently, with a smile which touched Wanda, "nothing! But, after all, what should one expect? Mists and fogs belong to the end of the day, do they not?"

"I am so sorry!" cried Wanda involuntarily, so heartily that Madame de Beaumont put out her hand.

"Never mind," she said gaily; "some day you will understand that for everything there are compensations. For instance, nobody now would think of contradicting me if I wished for the moon. You

would set about getting me something which should at any rate do as well, would you not, Elisabeth?"

"Dear mother, do not think about your eyes," said the Baroness uneasily.

Madame de Beaumont smiled again, then she seemed, as her daughter-in-law desired, to put the subject from her. Frau von Tellenbach began to ask questions of Wanda, as she had done once before, but either they were differently worded, or Wanda was not in her former antagonistic mood, for she answered readily and frankly, and got many an approving nod. The Baroness was not the less a kind-hearted woman because she was narrow-minded, and now that Herr Meyer was out of the place she could call to mind his good qualities, and speak of him with warmth which was grateful to Wanda. Moreover, to the truthful spirit of the young girl, there was something refreshing in plain common sense and directness, which she compared with the false sentimentality and underbred manners of the society she had lately shared. She gradually became altogether at her ease, and unconsciously showed herself at the best advantage. She felt that she had righted herself in her own estimation from the effects of her father's over zeal, and now if they wished for her companionship it was their own seeking, and she might enjoy herself freely.

Why there should be so much enjoyment in the society of two elderly people, she did not go on to ask. But it is certain that throughout the visit there ran a happy consciousness that she was doing what Baron Rudolf had wished her to do.

She talked, then, in answer to the Baroness's questions, frankly enough about her occupations, her music, her reading, but guardedly, as Madame de Beaumont noticed, when anything that was said touched upon her uncle and aunt. She was watchful for opportunities of paying little attentions to her hostesses. In fact, on either side there was the conviction that something was owing to the other in the way of compensation, and a generous anxiety not to be wanting in paying it.

Presently the Baroness took up her key-basket and left the room. One of her chief difficulties lay in combining the house-work she had now undertaken—for only Lisa and old Johann remained—with her devoted care of her mother-in-law, and Wanda's presence gave her an opportunity which she would not lose. Madame de Beaumont, on her part, was glad to be left alone with the girl. She was attracted by her. Her voice was sympathetic, her laugh happy; and now that Rudolf was away, and all that silly business at an end, she was at liberty to indulge her likings. But when the

Baroness went out of the room Wanda became silent, and Madame de Beaumont, who divined the reason, smiled.

"Well, what are you going to do for me?" she said in French.

"Would you perhaps like me to read aloud?" asked Wanda timidly.

"No. And you need not cast about for any charitable ways of benefiting me. I believe a little wholesome neglect would be welcome; at any rate, don't force me to feel grateful to you just directly."

"Ah!" said Wanda, comprehending and smiling.

"If I for once could put myself on the side of the one who obliges, instead of always being the receiver! Well, are you shocked?"

"No, Madame; but I was thinking you have just done what you wished."

"Now?"

"By refusing my offer. I hate reading aloud, and I was so much obliged to you."

"That is right," said Madame cordially. "I foresee we shall be on the best of terms. You must often come here. It is as my daughter says; we have no young people in the house, and our very ideas are getting wrinkled. But tell me a little more about yourself, and how you pass your days. Does that aunt of yours interfere with you much?"

The words displeased Wanda.

"You see, I have come here," she said, in a tone which the old lady understood.

"Yes, I see, or rather I hear," she answered, "and I perceive you demand respect for your relatives, in which you are right. Pray pardon me. But your father will surely not leave you long by yourself?"

"I hope not," said Wanda sighing.

"You miss him so much?"

"Miss him!" The word was evidently so feeble that she discarded it with scorn. "I can never tell you what my father is to me. When he is there I want no one else."

"What will you do when you marry?" asked Madame de Beaumont involuntarily.

"We must still live with my father, or he must come to us," said Wanda simply.

"Good Heavens, what an escape!" thought Madame de Beaumont with secret amusement. "Rudolf at the Works, or Herr Meyer here! But she is a dear little thing."

She held the same opinion an hour later. They talked of many things in that time; there was a freshness and intrepidity in Wanda's opinions which interested her companion, and led her on from point to point.

"I should like to be a mouse at one of your *Kaffees*, I think," she said once.

"It might be better to be a mouse than a girl," said Wanda considering. "One would not feel so ashamed."

"But what can they say?" persisted Madame de Beaumont amused. "There is no scandal in the neighbourhood. It is too dull for it to exist."

"It is gossip, then, which may be as dull as you like. How much so-and-so has a year, why such a girl is not married, what that lady puts into her soup—nothing is too small."

"And I suppose we are not spared?"

"Nobody is spared," said the girl a little confused.

"Do you have gentlemen?"

"Oh, no; at least Lieutenant Wolff sometimes comes, but I do not believe he likes it."

"Ah, well," said Madame de Beaumont with a sigh. "You are young and critical. Some day I daresay you will not think so contemptuously of a *Kaffee*."

"I do not think one can alter in that manner," Wanda said, shaking her head. "Indeed, Madame, it is because you do not know what it is that you think it possible. It is humiliating enough to feel that others find pleasure in heaping together such

foolish little shreds, but if I thought I should ever do it myself I should——”

“What?” asked Madame.

“Run away, I believe,” said the girl blushing.

“Out of the land of *Kaffees*?” said Madame de Beaumont lightly. “It would be the land of something else, my enthusiast.”

“Do you mean it is always like this?” said Wanda, fixing her eyes upon her. “Nothing better?”

“As to that, in France talk is certainly better worth the hearing. But society does not too much trouble itself about the level of conversation.”

Wanda was silent, but presently she said:

“I don’t want society then, but——”

“But what?”

“Friends. The Professor and his sister do not talk like the Frau Generalin.”

“The Professor and his sister! They sound as long and as dry as two or three of your mile-long German words tacked together. *Va!* it is very evident to me that I should be admirably placed at one of your *Kaffees*.”

They ended their talk smiling. The Baroness came in, pleased to find that her mother-in-law had brightened, and disposed to be the kinder to Wanda in consequence. She felt some wonder that her

husband had not returned, and even a little secret uneasiness, but she would not for worlds have confessed it to his mother, being under the impression that unless she spoke of anxiety, others would not think of experiencing it, and nothing would have surprised her more than to know that Madame de Beaumont's ears had for some time been on the alert. Wanda got up, feeling that she had been there longer than she had intended, but she was astonished and pleased at the cordiality with which she was invited to come again. The Baroness even went to the door with her to pat Miranda. It was the first time that the young Baron's name was mentioned.

"My son made a great pet of her," she said.

"She is his again whenever he wants her," said Wanda. "That he understands."

Frau von Tellenbach stared in a little surprise.

"Oh!" she said, "it is very rarely that he alters his mind."

Wanda rode gaily down the road, with these words in her ears and a contradictory smile on her lips. "But he sometimes does alter," she thought, "and he has altered now. He used to dislike us all, but if he had disliked us he would not have asked me to go there, nor should I have gone. I wonder what made the change? Probably the find-

ing out that he was not to have a wife thrust upon him against his will." She went on with her thoughts, which were not unpleasant, for the smile still lingered on her lips. She looked kindly round at the Rothwald trees, and patted Miranda's glossy neck. Oscar had been kidnapped at the Schloss, where old Johann resented his desertion. The wind had died away, there was a dull languor in the air, a heavy stillness in the clouds overhead, the grasses by the roadside hung dank and lifeless, but in the girl's heart a warm gladness glowed which no coming thunder-storm could depress. Suddenly Miranda, who had been daintily and playfully picking her steps, as though in sympathy with her mistress's mood, started, and Wanda herself could scarcely restrain a cry. A man who had been lying unperceived under the hedge had risen up, and with a thrill of dislike she recognised the little hunchback. The groom was behind her and she felt no fear, but the cowardly attempt to kill Oscar at once came into her mind, and she looked angrily at him, and would have ridden on, but that he placed himself directly in her road.

"I have been waiting to see you, *gnädiges Fräulein*," he said, with a smile of triumph on his pale face. "I knew you had gone to the Schloss and would be coming back soon."

"What can you want with me?" said Wanda haughtily.

"Ah, what! Perhaps I have some news for the gracious young lady. The most despised among us may bring news sometimes, *nicht wahr?*"

In Germany the separation between the classes is sharply drawn. German ladies do not go about among the poor, and hear little personally of their distresses. But Wanda had a kind heart, and in spite of her indignation with the man, a thrill of pity touched her as she noticed his deformed figure and white face.

"You have been ill, Hans," she said suddenly, without answering his words, "and you look very wretched. What is the matter? Can I do anything for you?"

He stared at her.

"The matter," he repeated, "with me?"

"Are you hungry?" she asked, in a low voice. "You look so!"

Apparently he had recovered himself to some degree, for he answered sharply:

"When one has a wife and three children, and is kept out of work, food does not jump into one's mouth so freely."

"Who keeps you out of work?"

"Who? Eh, my most gracious, that you can tell

better than I. Who says that I am a poacher and should be turned out of the place?"

"All Lauterthal, I believe," said Wanda looking at him. "Hans, why did you shoot Baron Rudolf's dog?"

The hunchback was silent. Then he said, with something of a struggle, "I did not—intentionally. I only meant to threaten him."

The girl's face lighted up. "I am glad of that. It was such a horribly cruel thing to do," she said promptly.

Perhaps this ready faith in his word was the most astonishing thing which could have happened to the man, for he stared at her, and his hand began to tremble. Meanwhile she was considering. A spring of happiness seemed to be gladdening her own heart that day; she was sure that in his face she read misery, and the contrast was so painful that she longed to do something friendly to lessen it. Presently she said softly:

"I am very sorry that you cannot get work. I will ask my uncle if he can find something for you to do, and let your wife come and see me this evening. It must be very hard to see them hungry. Keep up your heart, Hans. If you will work, I am sure all will be well."

She nodded to him and rode on a few paces,

then checked Miranda and turned again. The hunchback was standing where she had left him, staring after her. She rode up to him.

"But I have never heard what you had to say to me," she said. "What was it?"

The man started, muttered something, and turning from her began to walk rapidly away. Wanda looked after him with a smile of wonder on her face. "He is certainly a little cracked, I believe," she said to herself, "and dreadfully poor. I shall give his wife a good bundle of things, and make Uncle Jacob employ him. But what can he have to say to me? Perhaps the Baroness will help him." Her thoughts wandered away. She broke into a little song of Mendelssohn's, which was often now in her mind:

"So sagen wir 'Auf Wiedersehen.'"

sang Wanda, with a happy thrill in her voice. Just then something else happened to surprise her. She saw, below her on the hill, a figure which she recognised as that of the Baron. He had always been friendly in his manner towards her, and on this friendly day she looked forward to a pleasant greeting. But as she quickened Miranda's paces in anticipation she beheld, to her astonishment, that the Baron was clambering over a gate, as it seemed to

her with the express object of avoiding a meeting, for there was no short cut to the Schloss, or object in his turning off. This for a little while set her thinking, but as she could come to no reason she soon left off and forgot it.

Meanwhile the Baron, who had indeed taken flight as she suspected, was making his roundabout way home over all manner of obstacles. His face was flushed but grave. He held a newspaper in his hand, and every now and then broke out into muttered ejaculations. He reached his own door much heated and very red in the face, and bustled into the morning room. Not finding his wife he called sharply, and before she had time to answer, hurried upstairs in search of her. She came out on the landing, and at sight of his face turned pale.

“Rudolf!” she exclaimed.

“No, no; not Rudolf, nor anything to do with Rudolf,” said the Baron impatiently. “Women have never room for more than one idea! Rudolf is all right; I have a letter from him in my pocket. But, *sehen Sie wohl*, Elisabeth, a most terrible thing has happened! The Waldemar has gone down—fog—collision.”

“Ah, how sad! When did it happen? Do we know any one on board?”

"*Lieber Himmel*, don't you know!" said her husband staring. "The Waldemar was one of the Hamburg packets. Poor Meyer was on board her, on his way to New York!"

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE Rudolf's fortunes in England hardly deserved the cheerful colours in which he painted them to his father. When he arrived in London, he had gone for a night or two to Lord Heynham's, in consequence of a promise to Dick; and, to tell the truth, depending too much on Dick's vague assurances that his father would be sure to put him in the way of something. He had laughed at Rudolf's doubts.

The young German was no stranger at Lord Heynham's, but when he had stayed with him before it had been in the country, not in town, and the two modes of life were so essentially different that the one had not prepared him for the other. He had nothing to complain of in his welcome. The old lord was thoroughly kind and hospitable. He liked Dick's friend better than a good many other of Dick's friends, to whom he was obliged to be civil. The drawback was, that no one appeared to have leisure to take up Rudolf's affairs. Lady Heynham was a second wife, a good deal younger than her husband, and in the full swing of London

society. There was an unmarried step-daughter, not young, who had her own interests, and a married step-daughter with a large family, who always seemed to be wanting something. The eldest son was also married, lived in the country, and was crazy about music and art generally. Between them all there arose full occupation for the head of the house, who had not too large an income for his many claims. He listened very good-naturedly to Von Tellenbach, who had a feeling that his eagerness was extreme and out of place, for Lord Heynham's genial "Yes, yes," "To be sure," "We must see what can be done," did not, somehow, carry with them more than a general assurance of good-will. At the end of the conversation, Rudolf began distinctly to realise that it was no more than hopefulness, and the easy-natured desire that all should go well with his friend, which had been at the bottom of Dick's prophecies, and that the effort of hoping for other people is seldom surrounded with such troublesome difficulties as when it affects ourselves and requires a practical result. He accepted this lesson without feeling less affection for Dick, who had never intentionally misled him, and whose good-will had the more value now that he felt himself in a land of strangers; but it left him with a conviction that he must act for himself.

Lord Heynham, with every appearance of goodwill, begged him to make his house a home until he could hear of something, and all his hospitable instincts were on the side of his words. But even in that short stay Rudolf had learnt a good deal. Lady Heynham had a fancy for going to Switzerland, and must first run down into Cheshire; she meant to take the greater number of the servants, and leave her lord to a bachelor existence, in which position a guest would be inconvenient. She only half liked Dick, who she thought—perhaps justly—might do more for his family than paint a picture now and then, and she did not approve of a great German being, as she expressed it, saddled upon them.

And all this, somehow or other, she had managed should come home to Rudolf.

He was no coward to turn his back upon what lay before him; but he had a great deal of common sense, which at times proves a stern friend—it shows so hopelessly the realistic side of things. No foolish imagination or dreams, if you please, no rioting in fanciful helps or sudden strokes of fortune; expectation guarded on either side, lest she should break into extravagance; probabilities well in hand. The only probabilities which Rudolf began to feel he dared allow himself, were the chances of a

favourable result from Lord Heynham's inquiries among city men.

He asked one or two people's advice about lodgings, people whom he was told were practical and of good judgment. But those which they recommended were in rent so far beyond what he had resolved to pay, that he put advice on one side, and patiently set to work for himself. It is needless to say that his difficulties were many. It seemed but a small matter, and yet to be beset by obstacles. Some of the landladies objected to his being a foreigner, and against others, who would have welcomed him more warmly, his instincts rose up in protest. The rooms were grimy, the little servant maids slatternly, and yet he felt that he must turn towards more slatternly and more grimy quarters. He found at last a house which was not so repugnant to him as many others had been. It was on the far side of Leicester Square, a locality to which none of his advisers had directed him, and he was first attracted to it by noticing that a little ivy—with black leaves to be sure, but yet ivy—was trained, German fashion, round a window, and that inside a bullfinch's cage was hanging. The little maid who opened the door, was not much less untidy than others who had disgusted him; but the landlady looked a good-natured Irishwoman, and came to

speak to him with a puppy hanging on to her dress, and two cats bringing up the rear. The house was, indeed, a complete menagerie; but the animals gave Rudolf a sense of homeliness, which hitherto he had sought in vain, and he decided to go no further in his search. In spite of Lord Heynham's hospitable offers, he moved into his lodging the next morning.

The first night that he spent there he felt dreary and lonely enough. The heat was stifling, and the noise of the streets had in it that heavy inexorable East-end roll which, when a man is downhearted, seems to go pounding on, crushing beneath it all his hopes and aspirations. Von Tellenbach first shut his window, then flung it up as far as it would go, and sat down by it smoking his pipe. The puppy, who had been employed in dragging the stuffing out of a shabby footstool, threw himself on his side and slept the sleep of the young, every now and then rousing himself to snap at the flies. Rudolf took out of his pocket a list of names given him by Lord Heynham, people who he thought might do something for him—the vague generality which he had already begun to hate; and, as he scanned it, his immediate impulse was to tear it up. Prudence checked the impulse; he determined that his first duty was not to allow pride to come be-

tween him and any chances of success, and that he would go the next day and find out whether good were to be got by their means.

But Lord Heynham's list was as general as the good-will. The busy men to whom Rudolf went perhaps distrusted a German Baron, and felt that a man without a pedigree, who had brought into this world an inheritance of labour, would better answer their purposes. They made sure that this one was expecting more than they could give, and at once put him off with civil regrets, and promises that if anything turned up which would be likely to suit him, he should hear of it. For a time Rudolf fed upon these assurances, having, indeed, little enough other food for his hopes; but by-and-by his inexorable common sense put an end to them.

It in no way, however, altered his determination. How could he go back to Germany and live upon his father and mother? As he began to feel the absolute force of the word "privation," he realised with a sharper pang that those at home were tasting something of its bitterness, and that he was proving himself unable to help them. He had always firmly believed that but for his father's opposition he might have done something in the world, but here he was, to stand or fall by his own merits, and it did not seem possible that he could earn so

much as his dinner. He began to be possessed by a feverish energy of determination to wrest from fortune the gifts which he felt to be his right; by day he walked here and there seeking occupation, by night wrote fierce articles reflecting his own view of the world, which he posted to German newspapers, and waited hungrily for answers which never came.

He had not chosen badly as to his lodging. He was lonely enough, but without the dogs, cats, and birds, the loneliness would have been far greater. The puppy was at the age of floundering affection, had no tact, and used his teeth upon everything, but Mrs. O'Connor never had the heart to give him a worse punishment than a slap, because, as she said, he reminded her so dreadfully of her own little Mike that had run away to sea, Heaven bless him, when he never could bear the sight of water at home. The two cats had strayed starving to the house on different occasions, and had very sensibly declined to leave; and as for the bullfinch, he had been presented by a lodger in lieu of rent, and was looked upon by Mrs. O'Connor as a thrifty investment, for wouldn't money have gone in coals and candles, and been burnt long ago? Rudolf liked the bullfinch, perhaps, the best of all the creatures. It hung in his window, and took a fancy to him,

which it did not to everyone, ruffling its feathers and dancing with pleasure when he came into the dingy little room, with its shabby furniture and stained paper. When he had been tramping all day from one hot street to another on his unsuccessful errands, he would generally remember to walk on until by-and-by he came to a yard or heap of building materials, where between the stones patient search would be rewarded by the discovery of a bit of shepherd's purse, or perhaps only a little root of grass. Once or twice people who saw him groping there thought he was mad, but they did not trouble themselves more about him, and the bullfinch greeted him rapturously.

His landlady was not a bad sort of woman, and she took a fancy to her lodger, particularly after his home letters had revealed the fact that he was a Baron. Her bosom friend, Mrs. Jennings, who also kept lodgings, and it may be was a little jealous of a distinction her own lodgers had never boasted, implored her, with tears in her eyes, to be cautious. There was no knowing what foreigners would do, and she had heard that the more they swindled the grander they called themselves. Mrs. O'Connor laughed in her face, and expressed a trust she might never know any one nearer to a swindler than her Baron, so nice spoken as he was, and not

a bit high! Whereupon Mrs. Jennings hoped, with some bitterness, that he might have a right to be high.

Rather an unusual characteristic of Mrs. O'Connor's was a touch of reckless liberality, which induced her, if she thought any favourite lodger was stinting himself, to add things from her own stores quite freely, and without calculations as to return. This impulse, it will be understood, had its inconveniences. It led occasionally to her own supplies running short, and to the same instinct of careless prodigality causing her to make up what was wanted from her lodger's. No one could have accused her of actual dishonesty, for she would have shared her last crust with you, but would also have counted upon your sharing yours with her so entirely, that if you were not there the emergency would have certainly led her to help herself. Such disregard of property, whether her own or other people's, had its manifest inconveniences.

She felt very kindly towards Rudolf, who was young, tall, good-looking, and lonely. He made no disguise of his poverty, and this interested her the more, and raised a kind feminine indignation in her breast that fate should be so unjust. As the days went on all that he could do towards earning his living was to exercise an ever-increasing economy,

which he did with a rigidity highly displeasing to his landlady. She expressed it, pithily, as a shame, and told Mrs. Jennings that she was not going to see the Baron fading away before her very eyes. Rudolf, indeed, remonstrated more than once upon the appearance at his table of certain delicacies which he had not dreamt of ordering, but as Mrs. O'Connor, when summoned, appeared to find a lofty difficulty in understanding to what he alluded, and when her mind had been forcibly fixed on the dish, treated it with absolute indifference, as something which had casually found itself in the house and was there spoiling until she thought of this way of disposing of it, he, in his ignorance of English habits, scarcely treated the matter with more attention than she appeared disposed to give.

CHAPTER VI.

RUDOLF had been three or four weeks at his lodging, when he received a letter from his mother telling him of the loss of the Waldemar. This he had indeed seen for himself in the English papers, but had read to a certain extent carelessly, and without connecting the wrongly-spelt name of a passenger with that of Herr Meyer. The news, when it arrived, shocked him unspeakably. Under-lying the old antagonism between the two families, there had always existed a mutual regard, which adversity on either side never failed to deepen. But now, without caring to analyse it, Rudolf was conscious of a strong personal feeling, which he explained by the fact that of late his thoughts had necessarily turned much towards the Meyers. It was quite true that they had often been weighted with indignation and wounded pride, but after all, what had Herr Meyer done? He had had his dreams like many another man, and had presumed too far upon his riches, but the dream being rudely ended, he bore no malice, and, indeed, had be-

haved in an exceedingly fair and straightforward manner. And when such a death as this comes to one with whom we have been concerned, who can remember his failings? Petty offences either die out of our mind, with shame that they should have seemed so considerable, or with a deeper shame are owned to have come from ourselves, and to need the forgiveness which we long for—too late. Rudolf began to feel as if his own conduct had been abominably contemptuous.

But what really haunted him was the thought of Wanda's grief. His mother wrote of her with deep pity. She had been at the Schloss that very day, she said, when the news of the wreck reached Lauterthal, and they had grown to know her better and to like her, so that their compassion was the greater. From what they could hear she was heart-broken, and yet refused to allow that she believed in the hopelessness of the catastrophe. The collision had taken place at night, some of the passengers had been saved by the steamer which ran into them, one or two boats were swamped, the smallest was missing, but no hope of her being yet afloat existed in the minds of those who best knew whether hope were possible. It was one of those awful catastrophes which set human skill and foresight at nought, happening, as it appears, without

adequate reason, and bringing with it a great wave of sorrow. So many killed, so many drowned, but no record gives the long list of those who follow, not less surely victims. The Baroness wrote:—"My heart aches for the poor girl, not only for her present terrible sorrow, but for her future in the uncongenial home. We are all well aware that Herr Meyer was a truly excellent man, but for his daughter he was everything, and only that day she was expressing something of the sort to your grandmother. How little we are aware what may be happening! I should be heartily glad if I could do anything for her. At present she will see no one, but the time may come when she will turn to us. For ourselves, my dear son, though I reproach myself with the selfish thought, it is impossible not to feel that Herr Meyer's death may prove a serious calamity. No one respects his brother, and it is grievous to know that we may be in his power. Sometimes I wish that you were here, but again, your father and I rejoice to believe that you are in a happier position. What it may be we can hardly gather from your letters, but we trust implicitly, and you know with what affection. God be with you, my Rudolf."

With a groan he let the letter slip from his fingers. The pang which the last words brought

with them seemed curiously slight even to himself. He could only think of Wanda's desolation and grief, and wonder whether no one could give comfort. His mind busied itself in imaginary solace, and in impatient reflections on her position; it was only slowly that he roused himself to what reason told him concerned him most, for what had he to do with Wanda? Yet, when the longing seized him to catch at his mother's hinted desire, and go back to Rothwald, he could not honestly say to himself that it was only to see how they prospered at the Schloss.

There, anyhow, was the longing, but he put it sternly aside. The man's desire for independence rose up too stiffly and strongly to be ignored. Better anything than to go back and own himself beaten in the battle of life.

Was he beaten or not? Sometimes in those next few days he thought he was. All the vague ideas which Dick had floated into his brain disappeared as entirely without trace as Dick himself, of whom he heard nothing. Once he walked round by Lord Heynham's house, and saw that it was shut up and deserted. After that he felt more than ever alone. He had come down many a weary step in his hopes, and would have been content with a very different position than once he had dreamed about;

but even on this level nothing showed itself, or if it showed, slipped from him into luckier hands. There were lower levels yet, at which he looked askance, doubtful whether necessity might not drive him down to them.

The weather was very hot. In after years Rudolf used to declare it was the hottest weather he ever knew in his life, perhaps because together with the brooding heat there was a sense of depression and solitude, which made the worst oppression of the two. Sometimes, when evening came, he would take the puppy, and march off to the parks, but often he was so tired with the day's fruitless tramp that he was not disposed to go beyond the seats in Leicester Square. There he would stretch himself, the puppy would launch forth in innocent pursuit of mischief, and through the smoke of his pipe visions would float softly before Rudolf's eyes. The big fellow had a kind and tender heart, and when he thought of Rothwald and those who lived there, of his old grandmother growing blind, of his mother carrying her burden with a brave spirit, of his father with the weight of poverty round his neck, and the fear of losing Rothwald itself hanging over him; when he thought of their love for him and their trust in him, the black and sordid walls of the opposite house at which he was staring grew

blurred and indistinct. One day, in particular, somewhere not far off, a cracked hurdy-gurdy was grinding through its stock of familiar commonplace tunes, "Home, sweet Home; Home, Home, sweet, sweet Home." A man's voice caught it up, a street-boy began to whistle it, and Rudolf, sitting there, saw slowly rising before him the little street of Lauterthal, the canal, with its barges and its bordering trees, so many green patches reflected in the water; and on the path, persistently though he shrank from the vision, two figures, those of Herr Meyer and his daughter, as he saw them on the first day of his return. He grew impatient at last and stretched himself, bringing back his mind as he did so to the dingy houses and the shabby people about him. Why not? They were what he had chosen. At the thought, he leapt to his feet so suddenly that the man next him looked up and swore two or three sullen oaths.

"What do you go and give people a turn for?" he demanded angrily. Rudolf looked at him and then begged his pardon quietly.

"Something came into my mind rather too sharply, I believe," he said.

"Then you should stop at home," said the man, only half mollified, "and not go starting like that—curse you!"

He had a pale face, and as he spoke he looked uneasily over his shoulder, and slipped away before Rudolf could extract the puppy from a cluster of ragged children, and turn wearily homewards. He reached the house, gave the bullfinch a bit of grass seed, and once more counted out his little stock of money—there was little enough of it this time. He smiled as he thought of the barrenness of his two occupations, counting his money and listening for the postman's knock, which might bring an answer to some of the literary ventures he had cast upon the world, but which never did. In the bitterness of this thought he resolved the next day to do what he had as yet shrank from, feeling that any other kind of work would be less distasteful; he would apply to a school, and offer himself as German teacher. Perhaps if it were not, as it was sure not to be, he reflected ruefully, a grand school, he might undertake music as well. Just then he heard his landlady's voice on the stairs. She came in with a cage of white mice in her hands, and Rudolf began to reflect that fate perhaps intended him to go round the streets of London as the proprietor of a happy family.

"The cats haven't quite got used to them yet," she explained, "and I thought sure, sir, that they might be company for ye upstairs, and safer, bad manners to me!"

"And where did they come from, Mrs. O'Connor?" inquired Rudolf, without much warmth of welcome in his tone.

"Where would it be from but Pat Moore, the son of the sexton at S. Matthew's over the way? Sure the boy is always worriting me to kape his craythurs for him, when his father gets hold of them and lathers him, and I'm a weak-hearted sowl and can't say 'No,' with the thought of me Mike that might be in the same throuble if he weren't in worse."

Rudolf submitted to the white mice being placed near the window, and Mrs. O'Connor, who thought her lodger looked pale and out of spirits, and had a kindly faith in the enlivening power of a little gossip, began to shift the things on the table, and to hold forth upon her friends, the sexton's family.

"I'm sorry for them, I am," she said, "and that's thrue, for when ye've made yer bed in yer own way for twinty years, its aggravatin' to have to larn yer-self a new fashion, to plaze thim as thinks they knows better. Things is all going inside out at the old Church, which used to kape itself quiet and dacent, and interfere with nobody. Pat's father's doin' his best to put up with it, though it stirs his timper, and sits him more than iver against the white mice; but the bell-ringer, he's goin', and the organ-player, he's gone, and here's Pat rinnin' round

London to find some one to come and play the tunes on Sunday."

Rudolf looked up with the light of hope in his face.

"Mrs. O'Connor," he said eagerly, "where does the clergyman live? Why shouldn't I play the organ?"

"Ye can, sir?" she asked with wonder.

"Oh, yes, I can, of course I can; don't let us stand talking about it. That boy will be bringing some one else. I'll go at once."

"Is it Pat ye're manin', sir? Sure, he's just down below, seein' the cats have their supper, poor craythurs! and I'll be bound for it gittin' a taste himself, for his father was in that hurry for him to start, that he couldn't stop to have it at home."

"Well, I will go back with him," said Rudolf, drawing a deep breath of relief.

A month ago he would have smiled at the idea of a prospect such as this turning him sick with fear lest it should be unattainable, but now he was conscious that his heart was throbbing with anxiety, and that the pang of disappointment would have been almost unendurable. Pat, with a freshened persuasion of the advantage of taking things easy, and a prompt conviction that after such a piece of patronage the German gentleman would be bound to give house room to any others of his animals

which wanted a refuge, conducted him to the Rectory, where Rudolf found a very amiable and rather fussy young man, nervously determined to have his own way, and take the most stringent measures, while it evidently went to his heart to hurt any one's feelings or oppose their opinions. He explained to Rudolf that things at S. Matthew's had for years been suffered to go on in the most mechanical and lifeless manner, and that being newly presented to the living, he could not rest a day without endeavouring to improve matters. Evidently the storm which had been immediately raised in what he had looked upon as merely a stagnant pool, had driven him to his wits' end, though he was firmly resolved to die rather than yield. He had come up from a family living in the country, where the people had known him all his life, and were ready to stand on their heads in his service, if he had happened to require it, and the change absolutely bewildered him. Rudolf, who was clutching at this new hope with sickening anxiety, could not make out whether he were to be engaged or not, Mr. Edmunds having so much to say about his own difficulties. To tell the truth, the Rector also was doubtful, wishing that there was any one whom he could consult as to the hazardous experiment of engaging an organist of whom he knew nothing, while at the same time longing to be relieved from

his fears about the Sunday which was so near at hand. It was Rudolf who solved the problem at last, by suggesting that he might undertake the work for a week or two, when they could judge of his capabilities and fitness. Mr. Edmunds jumped gratefully at the proposition. Decision was such a labour to him, that he was for ever doing something rash in the effort to be decisive; so that, if Rudolf had not come to the rescue against his own interests, it is probable he would have ended the interview established as organist of S. Matthew's.

Mr. Edmunds had many suggestions and minute wishes to express with regard to the service, and Rudolf, to whom it was not familiar, was getting confused, when the door of the study partly opened. No one appeared, but a voice said reproachfully:

"If you don't make haste, Arthur, tea will be quite cold."

Rudolf got up to go, but his host pressed him so earnestly to remain, and the temptation of a little different companionship than what had recently been his was so great that he at length yielded. Besides, he imagined with a little amusement that here was one of the mentors whose opinion the Rector secretly dreaded, and that he owed him the opportunity of bringing his new organist before judgment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE voice belonged to a lady, a little older than Mr. Edmunds, whom Rudolf, on being introduced, discovered to be his aunt. She was small, dark, and brisk in manner, a complete contrast to her nephew, who called her Celia. Rudolf was conscious that she eyed him with a more openly expressed doubt than he had read in Mr. Edmunds' face, and being sure of himself was rather entertained than piqued at the catechism through which he was rapidly put. Mr. Edmunds was evidently more anxious than he. It was not until she spoke of training the choir that the young German grew troubled.

"I know nothing of that," he said. "I can play for you as much as you like, and I will do my best to teach, because it is of great consequence to me to get the engagement; but you must not think that I am an experienced master."

"And the boys here are very troublesome," said Miss Edmunds warningly.

"I am not afraid of their being troublesome, but

that I may not instruct them in the way to which you are accustomed."

She looked at him for a moment and then said:

"I cannot imagine what has brought you into this neighbourhood."

"My dear Celia!" murmured the Rector. Rudolf said simply:

"I came because I hoped to find employment in one of your great City houses. But I have failed."

"And what shall you do now? To be organist at S. Matthew's is not much for an ambitious man."

"Am I ambitious, madame?" said Rudolf with a certain astonishment.

"I should say so."

"Then this day I have brought my ambition to aim at finding a school where they are in want of a teacher of German."

"Ah!" said she, smiling and taking up a newspaper; "shall I give you an address or two? I can find some here."

"If you will be so good."

Rudolf departed that evening with a new spring of hope in his heart. He even began once more to allow hopes in connection with the postman's knock. For, after all, when one is five-and-twenty, and feels an aptitude for adding one's quota of wisdom to

the slender store of it abroad in the world, it is hard to conceive that the world should decline to be benefited. And Rudolf was aware that it would be infinitely more to his taste to make his livelihood in this manner, than by drumming German declensions into the heads of thick-pated boys and girls. He had, however, made up his mind to this labour, and felt there was an additional bond to his carrying it out in the words he had said to Miss Edmunds. On the following morning, therefore, after attending to the white mice, towards whom he experienced a lively thrill of gratitude, he took the addresses she had copied, and went forth on his new quest.

When he left the Rector's study the evening before, Miss Edmunds looked so reproachfully at her nephew that he murmured an exculpatory, "Well?"

"He is a great deal too good-looking," she said at once.

"Oh, that is nonsense! Besides, I see nothing particular."

"Look at the shape of his head, and his eyes."

"I am sure there is nothing remarkable in his eyes."

"Nothing remarkable!" she repeated. "They are not large, if that is what you mean, but they have

the most extraordinary power of looking through you, and taking an interest in what you say."

"That was because you were talking of his own affairs."

"Well, you'll see, if men ever do see!" said Miss Edmunds resignedly. "You'll see, too, if there are not plenty of applications for organ lessons. I only wish to warn you that your phoenix is likely to lead you into a troubled atmosphere, whether he will or no."

"Then you think him a phoenix?"

"I think him delightful," she said frankly. "It's that which shows me what sort of effect he will have upon all the young women of the parish. At nine-and-twenty my head may be regarded as well screwed on, while theirs——"

"Oh, they must take care of their own heads," said the young Rector impatiently. "What have the young women to do with the organist?"

"What, indeed! You will find out by-and-by."

"I only hope he can play."

"You need have no fears. He will play admirably," declared Celia.

"Why? What makes you so sure?"

"He would not have undertaken it otherwise. Oh, you need not stare, Arthur. I have never denied that he is a phoenix. I only say that a

more commonplace bird would be safer for S. Matthew's. I wonder what brought him here, and whether some *Mädchen* is not waiting and weeping for him in Bavaria. I shall never rest until I find out something about him."

"Celia!"

"Yes, I warned you."

The young man's countenance fell.

"Celia," he repeated uneasily, "I wish you would not make so much of trifles. There is a great deal to be done to-night, and we are wasting time. What about the boys' surplices?"

She jumped up and made him a little curtsey.

"That's for the Rector," she said, "but please to remember, sir, that I am your aunt, and expect to be treated with deference. The surplices are my department altogether."

She looked so young and so pretty as she spoke that her nephew was obliged to laugh.

"You are ridiculously unlike what you are," he said. "Nobody will believe it. I am afraid you had much better have stayed in the Isle of Wight."

"Oh, I wasn't wanted there," she said. "Constance is quite equal to the charge of all her children, and I could not discover anything in the least approaching to a mission. Now you would be absolutely lost without me. I mean to say all the

disagreeable things to the parish, which would otherwise break your heart, and to be civil to the phoenixes. You had better find another, were it only to counterbalance this one."

Poor Rudolf himself was conscious of no glories, fabulous or otherwise, being connected with him as he went patiently on his errand. He applied to a young gentlemen's academy, to an establishment for youth, to a middle-class college, and finally to a young ladies' seminary at Notting Hill. At each place a difficulty met him, that of references. He did not feel that he had the right to mention the Rector of S. Matthew's, since that gentleman knew no more of him than those to whom he was applying. And pride, which was still strong within him, forbade his giving the name of Lord Heynham. If he had fallen to this low estate he would have it unknown to his former friends. Dick might hear of it and sweep down to drag him away, or—which would be more terrible to Rudolf—report it to his father and mother. No! he was down and he would struggle upwards, if upwards it was to be, alone, so far as regarded former friends. But presently he began to be convinced that to find a situation on these solitary terms was impossible, and that to refuse references was to provide that the door should be shut in your face. He had walked all day from

one school to another, finding many others for himself; he had taken but little food, and at eight o'clock was to be at S. Matthew's vestry for his first choir practice. The seminary at Notting Hill was his last hope, and when the question had been put, and he had given his usual answer, and was aware that the usual result was to follow, he swallowed pride and gave Lord Heynham's name. It produced a more immediate effect than he could have anticipated; the fat vulgar little Principal, as she called herself, looking at him with quite a new respect.

"His Lordship resides in London?" she asked deferentially.

"He is just now in Cheshire," said Rudolf; and then, a happy idea seizing him, he fumbled in his pocket. He had there a short, kind note from Lord Heynham, written when he first went to his lodging, and offering any service which lay in his power. If she read the letter, Rudolf thought, Miss Jones might abstain from writing herself. Evidently it impressed her favourably, and she rapidly took note of the advantages to be gained by employing a German teacher on such friendly terms with Lord Heynham, that it might be hoped he would extend her connection.

"The young ladies return to their studies, Herr——"

"Tellenbach."

"Herr Tellenbach, in the approaching week. On His Lordship's recommendation I should have no objection to give your system a trial, on the usual terms."

She named a sum low enough for what had to be done, but with which Rudolf eagerly closed, and on the strength of it committed the extravagance of taking the underground train towards his destination. He was afraid of being late at S. Matthew's, nervously afraid of anything which might interfere with his engagement. He had already begun to look on the Edmunds as friends. When he came out of the station, one of those sunset effects which every now and then startle us in London, from their unexpectedness as much as their beauty, had flashed into sight. Over the foggy streets and in the midst of a grey bank of cloud a rift suddenly opened, and glowed golden. It was but a spot in the heavens, yet from concentrating in itself all the light, scarcely a passer-by but took his own note of it. Rudolf wished that Dick were there to see and set down the fleeting beauty. Thinking of Dick meant thinking of Wanda, though he would not have allowed the connection to himself, and as he strode through the crowded streets he was wondering why his mother had not mentioned her in her last letters,

and how her great sorrow had affected her. He remembered that once or twice Wanda's gaiety had made him angry. It seemed extraordinary to him that he could have been such a fool only a few months ago. He had a feeling that if they saw one another now—and then he burst out laughing. If his poverty and his pride had stood in the way before, what was there now to take them out of it? A teacher at a second-rate school—was this to be the ending of his dreams?

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR a time Wanda not only refused consolation, but by a pathetic contradiction refused to allow that consolation was needed. Again and again she expressed her conviction that her father was not drowned. It was in vain to attempt to impress upon her that no one else retained any hope, since she returned persistently to the fact that no survivor had seen Herr Meyer go down. There was, indeed, a general impression that he had got into one of the boats, but it was not that which had been picked up, and of the others there was no trace. For a time a glimmer of hope existed; it faded by degrees out of men's minds, and a sad certainty took its place. That Wanda would not receive it was not owing to any lack of urging, her uncle and aunt having from the first treated her opinion with some impatience, and showed no hesitation in pressing their own upon her. Indeed they embraced the hopeless view with such readiness that it might almost have been thought it had fallen in with their own hearts' wishes. Herr Jacob shook off a certain

hesitation which had hitherto marked his manner, together with a habit of keeping out of sight; the operatives at the Works were not the only people who were conscious of a difference. As for his wife, so far as any one knew, she had never thought it necessary to conceal what was disagreeable to others from their view. But this proved a mistaken conception of her character, for all that had seemed obnoxious in it at once gained so much strength, and became so apparent, that it was evident she must have exercised a greater self-control than had ever been suspected.

Poor Wanda thought little about it. Her thoughts lingered so tenderly and so faithfully round one central figure, that others beside it were dim, blurred, and unreal. Her ears were so continually on the alert for the sound of a bell which should bring news, ring back the dead to life, that she scarcely noticed the pricking and wounding words which fell upon her. When she thought at all of Frau Jacob's demeanour it was with a touch of thankfulness that she made no profession of unreal grief. That would have been unendurable. For anything else she did not greatly care. Her solitude left her more alone with *him*; she was constantly out on the great ocean, straining her eyes for a sight of the boat, and it grew to need all her

strength to hold fast her resolute belief that he was not dead.

Gradually—it could not be otherwise—the belief faded into wild hope, and hope itself at last might be said to have all but died. Not the slightest gleam came to throw a ray upon the darkness of that night, except the one bare fact which belonged in all its sadness to fifty others, that no one had seen him die. She never in so many words acknowledged that hope was extinguished, but she ceased to speak of it, and at last put on mourning.

When she had done this it seemed to her as if many months must have passed, during which she had taken no count of time. It struck her one day, as she walked in the garden, with a dull wonder, that signs of summer should be still around her, when, for all she knew to the contrary, autumn itself might have come to an end, and winter have begun to lay bare the world. She would have been glad if it had been so, if there had been mute sympathy with her grief, instead of the cruel revolt she read in the roses, which still bloomed up in her face as if they were calling her to be gay with them. Gay? Could she ever be gay any more? The garden was her chief refuge, and yet she could hardly bear to walk there. Here was his harbour

which she had jestingly declared was too ugly to remain; there was the green door in the corner—surely it would open, and let in the tall square figure once more!

But that pain of memory, which was so acute that on this day, as she came near the door, she stopped and put her hand to her head, was not so unbearable as the pain of imagination. For, generally, she saw her father, not cheery, upright, and hale, as she had always known him, but with sunken, hollow cheeks and starting eyes, calling “Wanda, Wanda;” drowning, starving, always alive, but always close on death, and such a death! The visions at that time were so terrible that she used to pray to be delivered from them, and to think with envy of those happier people whose dead lay quietly under the green turf in the Friedhof, and who, free from haunting fancies, could carry there their flowers and their tears and grieve peacefully. It sounded like rest in comparison with the anguish of her sorrow.

What she had suffered had greatly altered her. She was very white, her cheeks had sunk, and though her eyes were always beautiful, the want of colour, of roundness, and of animation, had changed her beyond what would have been believed possible. The heavy black, too, appeared to weigh

her down. Evidently it cost her not a little to approach the door, but perhaps she had resolved to give no more place than she could help to fancies, for after some minutes' hesitation she walked rapidly towards it, opened and passed through it, as if to satisfy herself that the one who was always in her thoughts was not coming up the road.

There was a figure, and its sight gave her a shudder, its unexpectedness seeming to contain so great an element of change as in itself alone to cause a shock. For in old days Jacob Meyer would never at that hour of the afternoon have been seen coming towards the green door, which, indeed, he rarely used. But now he was walking briskly—one might have said with a masterful air—towards Wanda, whose first impulse was to turn and escape to her solitude. She, however, resisted the impulse, and waited.

She did not dislike him as she did his wife, but the harsh croak of his voice never failed to affect her disagreeably, and it struck her afresh in his greeting.

"Good! I am glad to see you peeping out into the world again, Wanda."

Without directly answering him she said eagerly:
"Have you heard anything to-day?"

"No."

"Uncle Jacob, are you quite sure? Is there no news from the owners?"

"None at all."

"But you wrote, as I begged you, and asked them to telegraph?"

"Yes."

"On the very Monday?"

"Yes, yes!"

The girl's head sank, she held her hands clasped, and turned and walked back with him languidly. Herr Jacob looked at her, cleared his throat once or twice, and then said in a voice which this process had apparently rasped rather than softened:

"In Heaven's name, what do you expect to hear, Wanda? It is absurd. You must make up your mind to face the truth, and remember that there are numbers of others worse off than yourself."

Wanda looked up with a little sad scorn.

"There is not much consolation in that thought, Uncle Jacob!"

He glanced at her again.

"I have employed that fellow, Kaufmann, as a sort of messenger, as you wished. I expect to be the loser, but if I am he will not get off so easily. What made you take this interest in him?"

"He was so poor," she said indifferently.

"He was no friend of yours?"

Wanda made no answer; it did not seem as if words had their full power of reaching her, perhaps because her mind was too much occupied. He noticed this and said abruptly:

"I have never yet explained your position to you, or what arrangements will be made about your money——"

"Oh, no," she interrupted, shrinking, and putting up her hands, "no, no, not now! I can't bear it! I think it would drive me mad. Not until we know, until we are certain: do anything you like but don't talk to me about it!"

"And by-and-by, if anything displeases you, you will say it is my fault."

"No, indeed! I shall be very grateful to you for sparing me."

"Fine words!" he said gruffly, after a pause. "Remember, then, you decline to hear. Don't say that I would not tell you."

"Oh, no!"

"There is one thing which it is necessary you should understand. I am your guardian."

But Wanda had suddenly stopped, and held up her hand. An agony of longing, of expectation was in her face. She heard steps—presently the bell

rang, and she flew towards the house with the eagerness which only touched her now when there came a chance of news from the outer world. Her uncle stared after her, frowning.

"The girl is going out of her mind, I believe," he muttered, "and perhaps that would not be such a bad thing, for then we should be troubled by no inconvenient inquiries. However, she is as simple as a baby, and if Anna can keep her temper in check, and not irritate her too much, she will be easy enough to manage. Luckily there is no one of whom she can ask questions but me. The Professor is a fool in money matters, and Werther at Mainz too lazy to trouble himself. I shall not compromise myself either, only arrange that things shall fall out in the manner which best suits me. If, as I think, I can get hold of Rothwald—good. And I doubt Wanda giving me much trouble, for I understand her too well. Hot-tempered, impetuous, and dreadfully ashamed of herself when she loses her temper; warm-hearted, so that if anything should make her suspicious of me she will never listen to her suspicions, because," he broke into a short laugh, so harsh that it scarcely deserved the name, "because I am Gottfried's brother. It is odd what things influence people, but always useful to find out. Wanda will not say a word against any-

thing she thinks her father's brother has a hand in! Ha, ha!"

Before Wanda reached the house her momentary hope had evaporated, and the cold chill of sorrow regained its power. She was going slowly up the stairs when she met her aunt, dressed to go out. She looked at Wanda and said coolly:

"You should not have remained out so long, as I wished to inform you that I am making fresh arrangements in the house; however, if you go to your room at once you can assist Gretchen. Your things are being removed from your boudoir, for I find I require that room myself."

"For a time, do you mean?" asked the girl, surprised.

"Altogether. It is absurd that a young girl should be indulged with a boudoir."

The flash she expected was certainly to be seen in Wanda's eyes, but the next moment she turned away.

"Do as you please," she said wearily; "it is of no consequence — nothing now is of any consequence." Then she came back a few steps, resting against the balusters, and went on: "I believe it will be better for me to understand something of my position, though just now I asked my uncle not

to talk of it. Am I really to be dependent upon him for everything?"

"On whom else, pray? I, for one, am not aware of any closer relations, though it is true you have never chosen to favour us with many attentions."

Wanda looked steadily at her.

"*Bitte*, let me have an answer to my question. Am I dependent?"

"Absolutely. Pray does that satisfy you?"

"It is strange," said Wanda thoughtfully. The next moment she looked up with a sad smile in her eyes. "If he made it so, it must be right, and I am sure he would have desired that we should live in friendly peace. I will try to do better, *tante Anna*. I have had a great deal of love, and perhaps this has made me thoughtless and inattentive. It is gone now," she added falteringly, "and if we were to try, both of us, we might be more friendly, might we not?" and as she spoke she stretched out her hand.

Frau Jacob did not take it.

"We shall see," she answered coldly. "I prefer deeds to words, and as to being friendly, you will remember that, first of all, you owe me respect—*ja, wohl!* Certainly you need not expect the spoiling you have had to be continued now; it was always most ill-judged and ridiculous of your——"

“Hush!” cried Wanda, passionately. “Do not say it! Do not ever dare to breathe a word against my father! Oh, how can you!” she went on, her eyes flashing, her words swayed by an almost uncontrollable emotion. “Was he not always good to you and to everyone? Have you already——”

She stopped—choked. Frau Jacob shrugged her shoulders, and looked at her with a smile. She liked rousing the girl’s temper; it was a real satisfaction to her to see the colour rush into her face, and fade out, leaving a cold and angry whiteness. She would not have had Wanda meek or submissive, but wanted resistance which she might crush, anger which was impotent, possessing no power but that of storm, and leaving behind it a humiliating sense of weakness. She said slowly:

“I am exceedingly indebted to you for favouring me with this scene, which shows me that your professions are worth exactly as much as I imagined. Understand that I do not require your permission before speaking, nor do I intend to allow you to bestow it. And as for your being spoilt, if you don’t like to be told——”

“It is not for myself that I care,” broke in Wanda with heaving breast.

Frau Jacob went on as if she had not spoken:

“If you don’t like to be told the truth you had

better behave differently and prove the contrary. Now may I beg of you to go upstairs, as I desired before, and on your way ask the Frau Hauptmann, with more politeness than you generally display, if she will join me in the Saal?"

Wanda opened her eyes.

"Do you understand?"

"I am not sure," said the girl, going slowly up the stairs. On the second she turned and said abruptly: "In what position, then, is Frau Schmidt? Is she to be your companion or mine?"

"Certainly not yours. Let me advise you to draw in your extravagant ideas, since your uncle has the burden of supporting you."

Wanda threw back her head and looked her aunt full in the face.

"I do not believe it," she said deliberately and with emphasis. Then she turned, walked upstairs, and knocked at Frau Schmidt's door. "My aunt wants you," she said briefly.

When she reached her own room her countenance changed; she locked the door and began to walk wildly backwards and forwards, regardless of the things with which it was heaped, things from her other room, which by Frau Jacob's orders had been merely placed on the floor, and left there for her to arrange as best she could. At another time

she might have keenly felt the petty tyranny of the act, but at this moment she scarcely noticed the piles of her treasures. Her heart was in hot revolt, with anger, with shame, with the emotions which at her age rend and tear those who suffer them. Her passionate nature cried out against Frau Jacob with all its might. She was in a whirl. A knock came at the door; she flung it open, almost longing that it might be her aunt, and her flashing eyes at first frightened Gretchen, Frau Meyer's pert little maid. She, however, quickly recovered herself, and came into the room with an armful of books.

"And where am I to lay them down?" she asked, looking round; "there is no place left. The *gnädige Fräulein* will certainly have to burn some of these things of hers, just to make room for the rest. *Ach Himmel!* as if anybody could want so many!"

"Put them there," said Wanda pointing. "And now—go! Do you hear? And do not come back."

"But—Frau Meyer—what of the others?" said Gretchen, frightened again and disposed to cry.

"Go!" repeated Wanda peremptorily. There was no disobeying the look in her eyes; the girl went, muttering something, and she locked the door once more, and flung herself in a heap on the floor. A whirlwind of grief and passion seized her, until

she shook like a reed under its violence. She had not really known that she could feel so strongly and so bitterly, nor was hers a nature to submit to the power of a tempest without some struggles, and a horrible sense of shame, her anger deeply humiliating her in her own eyes. Was this, then, the life which stretched before her? It was the first time her grief had been awakened to what lay round and about the central sorrow, which till now had seemed to absorb her sensations. It is true that she had thought of her daily life with dull dread and loathing of its possibilities, but it had been, as it were, from far off that she looked at it, and no aggravation of what she already knew had presented itself. But a perpetual fret, an endless beating against the bars, fighting, passion, shame—these were what now appeared to her to hem her in without so much as a loophole of escape. She saw that her aunt intended to irritate her, and all the passion in her blood leapt forward in fierce answer. She would rebel. She would hold her own. Then, suddenly, into the midst of all this turmoil rolled back the great wave of sorrow which had been forced from its place by another disturbance—the recollection of past happiness came, the thought of her father's love, of the little things he had done to please her, the way in which he yielded to all her

wishes. Lying on the floor she broke into sobs which exhausted her by their violence, yet in some measure relieved her. For there came with them a tide of gentler feelings, the remembrance of a deeper Love, and of the Patience which endured the contradiction of sinners. The storm began to subside, the tossing emotions to be quieted, the Voice of Peace to rise above all the other voices and turmoil of the soul.

She rose up from the ground, but it was to remain upon her knees, and to pray as perhaps she had never prayed before.

CHAPTER IX.

It must not be supposed that the Baroness had forgotten Wanda in her distress. Always, indeed, when trouble or sorrow of any kind came upon either the Schloss or the Iron Works, it called forth in the other that kindly esteem and good-will which existed between them, in spite of differences of class and position, but were disposed to lie dormant when things went prosperously. Such a blow as had now fallen, by which the head of the house was cut off in full strength and health, was enough to quicken every pulse of sympathy in the place; and Gottfried Meyer was too just a master, too staunch a friend, and too genial an acquaintance, for his death not to produce an appreciable shock through the length and breadth of Lauterthal. His life had been so vigorous and hearty in its living, that it required an effort to realise that it was over. Jacob had never inspired the same confidence, and people now, when they talked of him, almost invariably compared him disadvantageously with his brother. There was plenty of very kindly feeling

bestowed upon Wanda at this time, and she might have had more if she had not shrank from it.

The Baroness made several attempts. She could not walk so far as the Meyers' house, and, perhaps, as she had never been there in old days, would have hesitated to do anything, even in kindness, which at such a time might look like patronage. She tried to speak to Wanda after the Church service, where she had been painfully touched by the girl's pale face and drooping figure, but Frau Meyer managed to sweep her away, and Wanda felt no energy to assert her individuality. The Baroness had to content herself with writing one or two letters, letters which though stiff were kind and good, and with sending old Johann with inquiries and messages, begging that as soon as Wanda could go anywhere she would come to the Schloss. At first the words fell with a blank lack of meaning on Wanda's ears, but as the days and weeks dragged on, and she became more awake to the loneliness of her position and was, moreover, seized with a hungry wish to hear what others said of what had happened—whether they, too, were quite without hope, as her uncle persisted was the case, or whether some faint glimmer might not come to warm her from their belief—she felt a sort of desire to go to Rothwald, and a clinging to them

for which she could have given no explanation if she had tried.

It may have partly been caused by her strange solitude. Except old Martha, there was literally no one to whom she could speak with any freedom. Frau Schmidt had been for a time honestly shocked and sorry; but there was something sentimental and high-flown in her sympathy which disgusted Wanda, now that she could no longer laugh at it, and Frau Jacob let it be distinctly known that if the Frau Hauptmann remained, it was on condition that she had neither eyes nor ears for anyone besides herself. She kept her because Frau Schmidt talked about great people with a familiarity which impressed her, and because she was secretly conscious that she did not herself understand the rules of society, and had an extraordinary dread of ridicule. A great deal of her dislike to Wanda rose from a feeling that she was superior to her in this respect; it rankled in her mind, and she never doubted its triumphing in Wanda's. But if she kept Frau Schmidt by her side and observed her conduct attentively, she hoped to dispose for ever of one of her daily vexations.

At any rate, Wanda could not now be her rival. The girl was thrown more and more upon old Martha, whose indignation at the treatment of her

darling Fräulein was too unbounded to leave coolness sufficient to make her a wise counsellor. Something she had known of old days, and the circumstances under which Herr Jacob and his wife had come to Lauterthal; and this something, whatever it was, had the effect of setting her against them, though she had promised her master to abstain from talking, and had heroically kept her word. But you can hardly do this without adding some grains to original dislike, and now their conduct was rousing a daily anger. She would not break her word to her dead master by telling his daughter; but nothing which she said was intended to mollify Wanda's indignation, rather, was continually hinting at base ingratitude, and at what she could say if she would. On the whole, it was not much to be wondered at that Frau Jacob, on her part, regarded the old woman with marked disfavour, and returned her dislike by suspicion. Wanda confided to Martha that she would like to go to the Schloss, and Martha jumped at the idea, for the girl's wan face was a continual terror to her, and she saw in the wish the first spring of returning energy. Hitherto she had wished for nothing. Martha would not let it die away as it might have done from sheer languor. More to satisfy her than from any keenness of desire on her own part, Wanda

asked one day at dinner whether she could that afternoon have the carriage, in order to go to Rothwald.

Her request seemed to have the effect of a shell. Her uncle fidgeted uneasily; Frau Schmidt grew red and clasped her hands imploringly, while Frau Meyer stared coldly at the offender. But she was the first to speak.

"Are you already, then, thinking of re-entering society?" she asked.

"If I were, it is what you blame me for not doing," said Wanda.

"Yes, you find it impossible to yield to any wish of mine."

"Oh, no!" said the girl, simply. "But it is not like entering society to pay a visit of gratitude for kindness."

"Your gratitude is extraordinarily discrimina-
tive. You keep it, I conclude, for certain acquaint-
ances," said her aunt, tauntingly. "Gratitude might
lead you to visit the Frau Generalin and Frau Lim-
berg, who have both asked for you as often as your
fine friends; but no doubt their inquiries were not
so valued."

There was enough truth in this to sting, and as Wanda could not explain, and perhaps had no ground for her persuasion that the inquiries were

weighted with very different degrees of friendliness, she looked at her uncle and repeated her question.

"Can I have the carriage?"

He frowned, hesitated, and said:

"Why should you go there?"

"Why should I not?" asked Wanda, surprised.

He still hesitated. Then he said sharply:

"No! I am of the same opinion as your aunt."

She said no more, and did not speak again through dinner. When the long, stuffy meal was ended, she ran upstairs and sent for Martha.

"Put on your shawl at once," she said quickly; "you are going to walk with me to the Schloss."

"To walk! Dear Heaven, no! It is too far for the *gnädige Fräulein*, when she has not been for so long outside the house. Where is the carriage? and whose carriage is it, I should like to know?"

"Never mind, Martha. Do you hear me? Put on your shawl and come at once."

Wanda walked very slowly down the stairs, across the hall, and at the door paused. She held herself upright; there was a fire in her eye, and a look which bespoke entire readiness to encounter opposition in whatever form it might present itself. But though a door creaked, and she heard something which sounded like the rustle of Frau Schmidt's

gown, no one was visible, and after that short pause she went out deliberately, and, with Martha by her side, took the road towards the bridge. The day was cloudy, and the mists seemed to press suffocatingly upon the earth; not a breath of wind touched the hop gardens or such fields of grain as were yet uncut. Heavy clouds were crowding together from the north, and now and then a distant and menacing growl suggested the probability of a storm. Martha looked anxiously at the sky and then at the Rothwald woods, which lay before them on the hill, and which in their gloom seemed to fling back to the sky its threats; but she did not like to say anything to Wanda, whose mood she could not understand. She was glad of anything which should rouse her, even if it were followed by a drenching. Roused she was, for the moment, beyond a question. She walked rapidly and resolutely, but silently, and probably found the effort of passing the familiar objects connected with her father one which could be met only by determination, and determination which required all her energies, for she kept her eyes on the ground, and looked neither right nor left, until there came an exclamation from Martha.

“There is that good-for-nothing little hunch-back!”

Wanda looked up. The man was standing at

some distance, where two roads met, watching her. When he saw that he was perceived, he turned round and walked off towards the Iron Works. The girl's heart smote her when she thought of that promise made so long ago—or so it seemed. She bade Martha make up a bundle of her things and take them to the wife that evening. The old woman would have been ready enough with her objections, but that, as Wanda glanced round her, she saw a look in the girl's face which almost frightened her.

For once having looked up, remembrances began to crowd and clamour. Every spot was thick with them. Here they had stood together to watch a barge which had got into difficulties with its towing-rope; there he had laughed at her because she had found so much fault with the pavement; over that bit of ground they had ridden together. Then came a memory with which he had no part. Just there she had last spoken to the Baron Rudolf. He had stood back from the road, and she had ridden up to him on Miranda; it had been a very difficult thing for her to do, but often since she had been glad that she had done it, and forced herself to speak those words. Now, that she was so desolate and lonely, she was the more glad.

She met with a tender welcome at Rothwald.

All Frau von Tellenbach's kind-heartedness had been quickened by the thought of the fatherless girl bearing her heavy burden of grief in what she felt sure must be an uncongenial home; all the respect they had really felt for Herr Meyer, death had intensified, as it does intensify such feelings; and when poor Wanda arrived, tired, pale, thin, the very shadow of herself, the Baroness put her arms round her, and kissed her as her mother might have done, silently and with tears.

"The poor child!" she said presently. "You have been ill, and we did not know it."

Wanda shook her head.

"I have often wished to be, but I am quite well."

"Well! With those cheeks! But you must not wish to be ill, for, see here, Wanda, that is neither wise nor right. God gives us trouble and also strength to bear it; is it right to wish our burden heavier than it is? You shall take off your hat and then come to Madame de Beaumont."

Wanda felt as if something, she did not know what, were hanging over the roof of the Schloss; there was the weight in the air, and the sense of oppression which makes itself felt without words of explanation. Madame de Beaumont's blindness had become all but total. It was pathetic to notice

how every now and then she turned briskly towards a speaker or a noise, and then with a sigh dropped her eyes. Nevertheless, she had not lost her characteristic brightness. Both the Baron and his wife seemed to have redoubled their care and attention, and her smile was no more wanting nor her piquancy of expression less remarkable than in other days. Wanda looked, wondered, and was by the very force of wonder lifted out of the atmosphere of her own sorrow.

For another matter, too, she was more consciously grateful. The Baroness, according to her theories, which were always well-established and invariable, was desirous to turn the girl's thoughts from the one subject on which they brooded, thinking it well for her—as indeed it was—to be roused and interested in other things. Madame de Beaumont had finer perceptions. Though sight was wanting, she read in the overstrained voice, the eagerness with which Wanda told her story, the relief which it was to the girl to speak, and speak to those who would sympathise, and she checked her daughter-in-law's endeavours with a whisper. Frau von Tellenbach yielded, though she did not think it wise. Indeed, it was the best medicine they could have bestowed. Except to Martha, Wanda had really no one to whom to pour out a

heart brimming over with conjectures, with sadness, with doubts that fluttered here and there in search of hope; and there was comfort in hearing what other people thought, and what reason they could find in her own fancies.

Of her uncle and aunt she did not complain, for she had a generous heart if a hasty temper, and as soon as she was away from people instinctively inclined to take their part; but things had crept out, others had heard of Frau Jacob's speeches, and the Pfarrer had been much scandalised by the bitterness of something she had said. A question had been burning on the Baron's tongue for some time, and at last it came out.

"At any rate, you must be quite independent of your uncle and aunt?"

"No, Herr Baron," said Wanda, simply. "On the contrary, he is my guardian, and she says I am dependent on him for everything. Perhaps, by-and-by, when I am of age, things may be different."

"Does Frau Jacob say so? Then I don't believe it," said the Baron, emphatically. "I don't think your father was the man to leave you in such a wretched position."

"Hermann!" said his wife warningly. But he would not be stopped.

"I am sure he would have arranged things better. Is that all you know?"

"Yes, all. You see there is no one whom I can ask. And he is my father's brother," added Wanda, with a touch of dignity.

"But a very different man," muttered Herr von Tellenbach.

"I forgot the Professor—at Nuremberg," said the girl suddenly. "I seem to have thought of nothing. He was our old friend. I might write to him."

"Write, by all means. By all means. And if that fails, if you like, I will put a question or two."

"You, Herr Baron!" said Wanda, turning to him in surprise. She added gratefully: "I should be very thankful; it would be an immense comfort to feel that I had a certain amount of freedom."

There was something very sweet and open in Wanda's expression when you saw her, as she was now, unfretted by little jars. The Baron, as he looked at her and thought of Rudolf, sighed; for he could not for a moment believe that this daughter, so deeply loved and so richly endowed, was not so well provided for as her father intended. He thought, rather, that her uncle, for reasons of his

own, wished to keep her in ignorance of her position, and all his honourable instincts rose up in protest against this conduct. Afterwards, when the coffee had been drunk and Wanda had departed, his wife came to him. She looked uneasily at him before she spoke, with a deepening of lines across her forehead, which had been noticeable of late.

"Hermann," she said at last.

"Yes."

"I know, of course, that it is your kind feeling towards that poor child which would induce you to interfere between her and her uncle; but is it judicious?" she added hesitatingly. "Horrible as it is to think of, we must remember that in a great measure we are in that man's power, and—if he were irritated against us?"

The Baron thumped his hand on the table.

"That it is pretty sure he will be."

"Then do not risk it," she said earnestly. "It is not as if you were connected with them or bound by any law of duty." Suddenly, catching sight of her husband's face, she stopped, walked across the room and returned. She said then, in a positive tone of voice, as if he had argued the question with her, "No, Hermann, if it were duty I would not say a word; but with the knowledge of the wretched position in which we are placed by Herr Meyer's

death, I maintain it would be wise to keep quiet. We can show her all the kindness in our power."

There was a moment's silence, in which her husband seemed to be considering her words. When he spoke his voice was hoarse.

"See here, Elisabeth; I do not believe that I rightly understand you. Would it be right—we being the only people who can befriend her, or so it seems—would it be right to shut our eyes to what we believe to be neither just nor honest? Tell me that."

"Why should we be the only people?"

"Is there any one besides?"

"He will foreclose the mortgage," said Frau von Tellenbach presently, in a very low voice.

"It is not what he will do, but what we should do."

"And we should be forced to sell Rothwald," she added in the same tone.

"Well," said the Baron irritably.

"It would break my heart—and Rudolf's."

"Then you do not include mine?"

"Ah, Hermann, *um Gotteswillen!*"

"Is it right, Elisabeth?"

"It is not incumbent," she persisted. She was standing before him as she spoke, but looking on the floor.

"Is it right? Yes or no?"

"Right?—yes, possibly," she hesitated. "But not a duty."

"If it is right, it is also a duty. And it is not like you, Elisabeth," said the Baron, with a touch of sternness in his voice, "to say that because it is possible for harm to come of it to ourselves, we should, therefore, not do our utmost to help the weak or the wronged."

She moved her hands impatiently, still looking down.

"This Professor may help her," she said, "and then?"

"Then I shall stand aside," said her husband simply. "I am sure I hope he may. It would be a great deal more agreeable to me. But if there turns out to be no one else to look after the girl's interests, I should be no better than a coward to let self-interest stand in the way; and you will think so too, best Elisabeth, directly you have given yourself time to reflect."

She suddenly looked up and kissed him on both cheeks.

"You are right, quite right," she said in an altered voice. "Do what you feel you should do. Your own heart is your best guide." But the next

moment she added: "Now that we know her better, I wish Rudolf could have liked her."

"Now? I don't know when I haven't wished it!" said the Baron forcibly. "You women were always so prejudiced against the Meyers. However, it is a blessing that the boy seems to be getting on well among his English friends."

When Wanda reached home, her aunt met her at the door.

"Be good enough to come into this room," she said coldly; "I wish to speak to you." And when the door was closed she continued, in the same tone: "May I request to be informed where you have been?"

"Certainly," said Wanda carelessly. "As I could not have the carriage I walked to the Schloss."

"In spite of my desire that you should not go there?"

"I do not think you have any right to express such a desire," Wanda declared. There was a change in her voice, but she spoke with studied quietness. "What reason had you for it? And there could be no possible impropriety in my going, for I took Martha."

"So I have been informed, and, as I expect to be obeyed in this house, Martha will be dismissed."

"Martha dismissed?" The girl turned white; this arrow had struck home.

"To-morrow."

Wanda made a violent effort to control herself.

"*Tante Anna*," she said, earnestly, "indeed it was no fault of Martha's. She did not know anything."

"Then she should have asked. At any rate this will teach her, and perhaps others as well, that there shall be no divided rule in this house. I don't mean anyone but myself to be mistress."

Wanda stared at her, as if she were trying to believe that her words were going beyond her meaning, but suddenly cried out:

"Martha shall not be sent away. My father would never have allowed her to be dismissed. Why, she lived here with my mother!"

"Then she has had a good home for a number of years, and should have known her duty better."

"Her duty!" repeated the girl, trembling with passionate excitement. "I do not know what all this means, or why you should wish to hurt me, but I tell you that Martha shall not go."

"No?" said Frau Meyer, folding her large arms and half closing her eyelids. "Nevertheless, I repeat that she will be dismissed to-morrow. Do

you still imagine yourself at the head of affairs here? Let me tell you those days are gone."

If Frau Meyer were angry, she was also cool, cool enough for Wanda to be stung by an exasperating sense of contrast as well as by a conviction of the impotence of her own wrath. She writhed under it, and her flashing eyes and shaken voice betrayed her when she tried to answer more calmly,

"I know I am not at the head—I do not wish to be there—but I also know, I am absolutely certain, that my dear father never intended that I should be altogether set on one side, or have the person I love best in the world taken from me. You may say what you like, but I am confident that I am not entirely dependent upon you." A rash longing to make her words impress themselves induced her to add: "Neither does the Baron believe it is so."

Frau Meyer flushed a deep red.

"So he has given his opinion, has he?" she said. "And you go to the Schloss to complain of us? That is what I imagined. Understand, once for all, that I forbid you to pay any more visits there."

Wanda turned and faced her.

"Nothing but force will keep me away," she

declared vehemently. "You may lock me up, or do something of that sort, and of course you may be stronger than I; but I give you fair warning that nothing else will hinder me, and that I go there whenever I can——"

"And offer yourself for the young Baron?" asked Frau Jacob with a sneer.

Wanda had been at white heat. These words, though for a moment they struck her dumb, seemed also to give back to her her self-possession. She took no notice of them whatever, but continued:

"Because I do not recognise your right to forbid me."

"Very well!" cried Frau Meyer, in her turn furious. "So you defy your uncle and me! We shall see!"

If she had wished to goad her opponent into rage, Wanda, as she went upstairs, had the indifferent satisfaction of feeling that she had succeeded. It was not so, however. She was too heated to judge fairly her own conduct, but already the humiliation of the encounter struck her with shame. She had not known that her temper was so bad. At school she had been rather proud than otherwise of hearing that she had a high spirit; now that she was trying to curb it, she was

conscious of degradation in the want of self-control which unnerved her. Martha came crying to say that she was to go, and Wanda sobbed through the early hours of the night, and only fell asleep from exhaustion.

CHAPTER X.

JACOB MEYER so far disapproved of his wife's conduct as to Martha that he reproached her sharply for folly. He had never before ventured on such a step, and though she neither minded the thing itself nor its suggestiveness, it was made, like other things, to count against Wanda. She and her husband looked at the girl from different points: he wished to reap definite advantages, while she was disposed to care for little beyond the momentary gratification which a well directed taunt will occasionally bestow. This emphatically is to be found connected with small matters, and as for the giving up inflicting petty mortifications, which her husband urged upon her, it was not in her nature to do it.

Martha had, therefore, to go, in spite of Wanda's angry and passionate remonstrances. The girl told Martha, and Frau Meyer also, you may be sure, that she was still in her service though she might not live in the house, and engaged a room for her at the nearest house she could find, where she

undertook all payments and wages with an entire disregard of means, thinking to herself that, if the worse came to the worst, and no money was allowed her, there were things which she could sell.

She was returning from arranging this, the next morning, Martha with her, when they met Lieutenant Wolff, and to her annoyance he stood before her in the path and obliged her to stop. He was pink with emotion, and had never made her so sweeping a bow, but Wanda kept her eyes fixed on the ground.

"You will forgive me for addressing you, *mein gnädiges Fräulein*," he said eagerly. "I am afraid it is disagreeable to you, and I feel I have no right to intrude, but if you only knew how earnestly I have longed to express my deep and respectful sympathy! And it is not that alone," he added quickly, perceiving that Wanda with a movement of thanks was about to pass on.

She glanced at him, and he saw that her beautiful eyes were full of tears. It goaded him into stammering out:

"It is to beg you to remember that if there is anything I can do for you, you will be giving me the most sincere delight by mentioning it. Frau Meyer informed me yesterday that you wished to sell your horse."

He stopped, for a sudden change in Wanda's expression showed him that his words were startling her. But she commanded herself to say:

"You must have misunderstood her."

"Oh, no!" returned the Lieutenant, shaking his head; "there was no misunderstanding. She asked me to find a purchaser. I never meant to move in the matter until I had heard from the *gnädigen Fräulein* herself."

It was evident that the Lieutenant was mistrustful. Wanda remained for a few moments without answering him, with her eyes fixed on some distant point. Presently she turned and said gravely:

"I am very much obliged to you, Herr Lieutenant. I shall not part with Miranda, so that my aunt must have made a mistake. Do not send any purchasers," she added, smiling for the first time.

"I will keep them off!" cried the young man fervently. When she had passed on he stood staring after her, for the first time in his life feeling himself—uniform and all—an absurdly insignificant being, and wondering at his own presumption. In Munich he had swaggered a good deal, and his present sensations were so entirely novel that they led him to invest Wanda with a sort of awe. Her walk at this time was languid, and in itself gave

the idea of a sorrowful life, and as he watched her he was conscious of a solid indignation forming itself in his mind against Frau Meyer.

Wanda, when she reached the house, sat down and wrote to the Professor, asking one or two questions in the form the Baron had suggested. She put them unwillingly, but these episodes of Martha and Miranda made her feel that they should not be delayed, and, with a reluctance that the letter should be commented upon in the house, she sent it by Martha to the post.

Nothing was said about Miranda, and Wanda held her peace, until the letter came from Nuremberg. Her uncle handed it to her, and stood waiting with a suspicious look on his face, which Wanda noticed and then forgot in the sadness of her tidings.

"Oh!" she said with a cry, "the dear Professor is terribly ill."

"Ill? Since when?"

"For the last month. I wondered I had not heard."

Herr Jacob walked away without any more expansive expression of sympathy, and it was not till Wanda had read Fräulein Müller's letter twice through that she remembered that it was in answer to her own questions that the Fräulein said: "We

cannot speak to him of business. Everything is forbidden that can lead to the least anxiety of mind." It recurred to her, however, as the first force of the shock passed away; and she wrote a note to the Baroness telling her how it was that she could learn no more of her immediate concerns, and sent it to the Schloss. She did not receive an answer to her note. What happened was that the next day the Baron walked down and asked for an interview with Herr Meyer at his office at the Works.

It was not pleasant to either of the two men.

To begin with, Jacob Meyer was astonished and enraged to find the Baron interesting himself for Wanda. The Von Tellenbachs had never been known to mix themselves up with the Meyers' affairs. They were of another class, and each family was fully alive to this fact. It was true that the talked-of marriage—merely in idea—had been an extraordinary breaking down of barriers, but it had come to an end, and that in a way at which the Von Tellenbach pride might not unnaturally take large offence. Jacob, thus, in his design to keep his niece in ignorance of her father's will, and to manage her affairs with a liberal view to his own interests, had counted upon no one at Lauterthal interfering, and was proportionably disgusted that the Baron should

ask questions. He answered them by saying that his niece had been in no mood for business, and that he should shortly insist upon her entering into it with him, and realising her position. The Baron would have liked to have heard the will or its provisions himself, but had to content himself with a leading inquiry or two. He said, for instance:

“Herr Meyer has, no doubt, left his daughter an ample provision?”

“That depends,” replied the other. “The Herr Baron is well aware that money matters are judged by comparative standards. It is possible that at the Schloss larger ideas prevail than with us at the Works.”

The Baron would have given a good deal to be able to resent the lurking insolence under these words, but he was overweighted with the consciousness that he was in this man’s power, and was meddling in matters which did not concern him. He said shortly:

“Hardly likely, Herr Meyer, since you know very well that you are a rich man and I a poor. However, no matter; no matter. I presume Fräulein Wanda will remain in your house?”

“Did you think again of suggesting another home, Herr Baron?”

To his surprise the other did not fume at this

impertinence. He looked at him and thought: "What abominable bad taste to refer to that unfortunate business!" but aloud only said: "Not if she is content where she is. My wife has taken a liking to her, to tell you the truth, and she fancies she does not look very well; but, of course, this may be owing to the shock of all this sad business. We shall always be glad to see her. I think you said the other gentlemen associated with you are Professor Müller at Nuremberg, and Herr Werther of Mainz?" and the Baron jotted down the two names on a slip of paper, and stuffed it into his pocket-book.

"Are there any more particulars about my niece with which I can favour you?" said the other in his harshest voice. "If I am not sufficiently ready with my information the Herr Baron must pardon me, his visit being so altogether unexpected and unusual an event. It will, however, pave the way for another interview with which I shall shortly ask him to favour me, such a mournful crisis as this obliging us to make new business arrangements. Monies must be realised before Wanda's fortune, in which he takes so kind an interest, can be placed at her disposal."

It was a threat, and the Baron understood it. Herr Jacob continued slowly:

"If it were not for this we might have allowed things to remain as they are. Delay would have done her no harm, for she has all she wants with us, though a spoilt child has of course whims which cannot be indulged. What do you say, Herr Baron? You are a father and should judge. I will be entirely guided by you. Shall we keep to the strict letter of the law, or act as would be best for—many interests?"

The threat had changed to a temptation. Herr Meyer let his words fall slowly, one by one, and here and there—as in that slight allusion to Rudolf—lingered longer. That the Baron understood him there could be no doubt. Great drops stood on his forehead, and the veins started out, cord-like, from the hand which lay on the table. As Jacob ended he stood up, and, in doing so, slightly staggered. His voice, too, was changed, though he spoke without an instant's hesitation.

"The letter of the law, whatever it may be, since you do me the honour to ask for my advice, Herr Meyer."

The two men simultaneously looked into each other's face. Jacob's eyes fell as quickly.

"*So!* That is your deliberate advice?"

"Yes, it is," said the Baron, recovering himself sufficiently to feel irritated.

"Ah!" The other appeared to have forgotten what they were talking about; for he went to the window and occupied himself with shutting it more closely, so that not a breath of air should enter. Then he suddenly turned round. "May I ask you, Herr Baron, when you will be able to give me the little interview to which I alluded?"

"When you please," said the Baron, standing upright and speaking in a dignified voice, which he seldom used, but which was not unimpressive. "I am not in the habit of leaving Rothwald, and shall be found where I have been found these many years."

These were his parting words. He went out of the door and along the white road, Jacob watching him as far as he was in sight, and, conscious of this, he did his best to walk manfully, and to abate nothing of his usual cheery swing. But he carried a burden with him which lay like lead, and by the time he was walking up the road towards the Schloss it showed itself in his steps. His wife, who had long been looking out of the window, immediately threw on a hood and went down to meet him.

"You saw that man?" she said eagerly.

"Yes, I saw him."

"And did you do what you intended? Did you find out anything about Wanda's affairs?"

"It is just what we expected. He meant to have traded on her ignorance," said the Baron, briefly.

"Is it possible? But now?"

"Now he will not."

Frau von Tellenbach was silent; she kept back a sigh which was rising in her throat. She looked at her husband and saw that his rosy face was pale, and that he was staring moodily at the ground. After thinking for an instant, she went close to him and touched his arm.

"I thank Heaven, Hermann, that you have done what you did," she said, in a deepened voice. "I, who ought to have helped, dissuaded you; I thought too much of possible consequences. After you had gone, I saw that you were nobly right, and come what will"—she laid emphasis on the words—"I shall always be proud that you did what your conscience bade you."

He groaned, and looked at her.

"It will cost us the Schloss," he said, slowly.

"It was right," she replied, in a low voice.

"Suppose Rudolf should find fault with my interference."

"Rudolf is your son, and will not find fault," said the Baroness, proudly.

Now that the interview with Jacob Meyer was over, husband and wife seemed to have gone back to their original positions, for the Baron began to foretell the worst of those consequences which he had defied, and to a certain extent laid the blame of them upon his wife. She, who had faltered in anticipation, now never reproached him, nor would so much as allow that he could have done differently. Nay, she wrote to Wanda to repeat her desire to see her often.

"Just imagine," the Baron had said, "just imagine that fellow having the bad taste to allude to that unfortunate affair with Rudolf! I only hope he does not taunt the poor girl with it. Oddly enough, though, he spoke as if it were we who sought the match, and had been rejected."

"One must be prepared for any insult with a man of that sort," said old Madame de Beaumont, before whom he was speaking. "My son, will you allow me to ask you to write a note to the Herr Pfarrer, and send it by Paul?"

"I will write it at once, *Mutterchen*, and see that he has it," said the Baron, reddening a little, however, for Paul had long been dismissed. Only Lisa and Johann remained in the house, and the Baroness herself did much of the cooking, to leave Lisa free for the house-work. But to Madame de

Beaumont the house was peopled as it ever had been; and once, when she had wanted to speak to Paul, Lisa had run down to Lauterthal and brought him up post haste.

As the Baron was returning from the Pfarrer's house, where he had been with the note, he was overtaken by a servant, who took off his hat.

"I was on my way to the Schloss with a letter for you, most gracious Herr," he said, "from Herr Meyer."

The Baron's face darkened: he tore open the letter, read it hastily, and began in an angry tone.

"*Schön*; your master will find me to-morrow," but interrupting himself, added: "No—stop! Rothwald need not have that humiliation. Say that I will call upon him at ten in the morning. At ten—do you understand?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE immediate result of the Baron's visit on Wanda's account was that the next day at dinner-time her uncle called to her to come to him, and read aloud the contents of a paper, so quickly that she could not altogether catch its meaning. Her ears, however, being sharpened by close attention, she held fast to a point or two and asked for information. He watched her as he answered, and was surprised that she seemed indifferent, and said no more than:

"Then I am not dependent."

"Are you not? All arrangements are in my hands. Yes; you are undoubtedly what I should call dependent."

"Ah!" said Wanda, looking gravely at him. "Nevertheless, it appears to me that I have enough to support a servant or two."

Jacob looked uneasy.

"Subject to your aunt's approval."

"Is my aunt mentioned there?" asked Wanda, pointing to the paper.

"I am. I shall ask her to arrange your establishment."

"It seems to me that my establishment will be kept out of doors. I hear she speaks of Miranda being sold."

"Because you do not use her. Unless you ride, a horse is a foolish expense."

"Then I had better find stables for her in the neighbourhood, for I give you my word, Uncle Jacob, that Miranda shall never be sold. And though I could not understand all you read, I heard enough to prove to me that I have my rights."

She would have given worlds for her voice not to tremble, but in truth she was more sensible of it than he was. He was reflecting angrily on the Baron, conscious that if the cords were drawn too tightly she would again complain to him, and he would apply to the other trustees, whom, one through sickness and the other from indolence, he was able to keep for the present from interference. It was quite true that much power was left in his hands, for Gottfried Meyer was a generous-hearted man, and had so far forgotten the early episode of his brother's life as to believe entirely in his integrity. It was also true that Jacob had given him no reason to doubt it, for he was one of those characters

which have sufficient control over their inclinations to refrain from wrong when there is a chance of detection. Self-interest with him was a science and not an impulse.

Angry, therefore, as he felt with the Baron, he would never have allowed himself the pleasure of anything approaching to revenge, until he felt that he could do so safely. But, looking every way, he saw no danger; and in truth this man, whom other men looked upon as somewhat *farouche*, and inclined to withdraw from sociability, was sharply stirred by ambition. To crush the Von Tellenbachs (who were the other power in the place) and to live himself at Rothwald, were the objects which it was joy to him to dwell upon and to gloat over. Now that the Baron was interfering with his plans, both his dislike and his ambition were intensified, and he reflected with satisfaction that in the coming November the mortgage might be foreclosed, and though this left the Schloss itself untouched, it would practically oblige them to sell it. Of this it was necessary he should give notice, and for this requested an interview. But with Wanda's affairs requiring judicious treatment, and with Wanda herself antagonistic—thanks to his wife and the Baron—he could not safely show himself implacable. He must temporise with her, impress prudence on his

wife, and not allow the Baron to believe that foreclosure was inevitable.

He flattered himself that he knew exactly the treatment which would answer with Wanda; he would have yielded minor matters, and was vexed things should have been driven so far about Martha. Frau Jacob was shrewd enough to see it as clearly as her husband, but she had not his self-control, and she had a far stronger personal dislike. Resist the inclination to petty tyranny she could not; and Martha was not permitted to return, but another maid, of her own choosing, was made over to Wanda, and on the subject of Miranda she was forced to yield. Wanda might therefore ride or walk, as she pleased, and occasionally, in a grudging sort of way, the carriage was offered to her, but the comparative freedom was hedged with restraints, for she could scarcely go anywhere without being called by her aunt to give an account of herself, and to receive reproaches which severely tried her temper. It was the same with each item of expenditure. The things were not exactly refused, but they were protested against and haggled over, until every mark represented a worry, and she often preferred going without what she wanted, to enduring these vexations.

Her chief happiness lay at the Schloss. It is

needless to say that these visits were incessantly combated by Frau Jacob, but Wanda would not yield. Sometimes she rode, sometimes walked, and as she disliked her new maid, often let her go no further than Martha's lodgings, and took the old woman as her companion. This was a constant pleasure to Martha; otherwise Wanda preferred to ride, when she could be silent, could think of her father, turning in her mind the atoms of hope which lingered there, and trying by all the magic of love and faith to make them larger. Rudolf also came back much into her thoughts. At times she heard something of him; she had insensibly grown so much nearer to his mother and grandmother that they would speak without reserve. She learnt a good deal of his character, read by their eyes; more from little portions of his letters, which were repeated to her; often she wondered whether he remembered her. Oddly enough, though the letters satisfied the others, Wanda doubted whether his prospects were so favourable as his manner of recounting them. She fancied she could read something between the lines.

Miranda understood everything, and was well aware that the long hill to the Schloss was to be loitered over. Each day it grew more beautiful; the glory of the autumn woods beginning to brighten

all the somewhat monotonous features, and to prove the right of the estate to its name, while the blue mists, for which the season is famous, bathed the level and commonplace country, which stretched for miles below, in a halo of mysterious distance. At one gate Miranda used at last to stop without Wanda finding it necessary to give her a hint. It was within sight of the Schloss, and Oscar, who divided his time very fairly between the two houses, would come racing down to meet them, and to greet his friends.

The Von Tellenbachs scrupulously kept from Wanda the knowledge of that debt which was hanging like lead round their necks. As yet it had got no further. Jacob signified to the Baron that he felt it desirable to realise Wanda's money, and should be glad of payment in November; but he did not leave the matter so absolutely without a loophole that the Baron felt hopeless; indeed that would have been difficult where the smallest slit served. It seemed as if Herr von Tellenbach instinctively made for any faint glimmer of light, with clear certainty that here day was open to him. His wife had perhaps naturally grown into distrust of loopholes. Now, at any rate, she was convinced that the Iron-master meant to give no quarter, and with her own consequent deep anxiety, nay misery,

the resolution with which she upheld her husband's spirits, chatted with her mother-in-law, and herself filled the gaps of their scanty household, could not be regarded as less than heroic.

Wanda had a vague feeling that there was trouble, though she did not know what it was. She had also a suspicion that Madame de Beaumont, with whom she spent a good deal of time, was troubled by misgivings; but if it were so, the old lady had a marvellous power of putting anxiety on one side, and she fell into the loving traps carefully arranged by the Baroness with the utmost apparent unconcern.

"I am glad you have taken Lisa to wait upon one," she said, smiling; "she is steady and trustworthy. So far as comfort is concerned, those giddy-pated girls are better behind the scenes." Once she casually asked Wanda whether she had seen anyone of late working in the garden, or near the house, and Wanda replied innocently, Yes, there were two men that very day. Neither of them knew that the men were really labourers belonging to the farmer to whom Herr von Tellenbach had let the grounds of Rothwald up to the very doors; and though it struck Wanda as strange that they should be digging up grass and flowers with the evident intention of planting something more useful,

she looked upon it as an economy of the Baron's, and did not think it necessary to comment upon it.

During those autumn days she grew to consider the Schloss as a haven of peace, where she could be free from the jarring frets of which her home life was full. The atmosphere of comparative refinement pleased her; she did not realise the poverty which never obtruded itself, however painful its pressure in the background. Something which Martha said one day gave her the first hint.

"Yes, the poor Baron is doing his best to keep his head above water; but if the Herr Jacob has made up his mind to push it under——"

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?" asked Wanda, who was sitting in the old servant's lodging, idly twisting some ivy round the window.

"Ah, dear Heaven, all the world knows that things are going very badly up there, and a good many will tell you that the Herr is causing it. Some say that he has his finger upon the Schloss itself, and means to settle there before he has done."

"The Schloss!" exclaimed Wanda; "the Schloss! My good Martha, someone must certainly have been trying to take you in. It is absolutely absurd."

"It is true, you will see," Martha persisted,

stubbornly. "My gracious young lady, I have known Herr Jacob longer than you, and I verily believe better than our own poor Herr, for I would never have left him the master. Don't you give way to them."

"I! What does all that matter!" interrupted Wanda, impatiently. "My uncle at Rothwald! Oh, it is not possible, it must be prevented!"

"No, there are things which happen whether we will or no," said Martha, with philosophy. "I am going to make steam-noodles for you when you come again; you used to say there were none like mine. Can't you stay longer? Well, *grüßs di' Gott, mein gnädiges Fräulein.*"

Wanda stayed away from the Schloss for a week. She felt too much ashamed of belonging to her uncle's family to dare to go there. The more she reflected and took into account certain taunts which her aunt had let drop, the more she feared there was truth in Martha's gossip. How it could be she could not imagine, and was dying to find out; but lying awake at night, and vainly searching for suggestions on this side and that, she was literally terrified to discover how utterly helpless she seemed. The Professor's illness lasted. Fräulein Müller was absorbed in nursing him, and the only remaining friends were those very ones threatened

at Rothwald. In thinking this she was ungrateful to the Lieutenant, who came constantly, and was more rosy and devoted than ever; but though she liked him, it was never with any added thought that he could be made practically serviceable. The idea which added tenfold to her distress was one which arrived by intuition, that it was the Baron's interference on her behalf which had perhaps irritated her uncle.

At last she could keep away no longer.

One wet afternoon, when the Baroness felt more than usually depressed, and was reflecting that it was perhaps as well that her mother-in-law should be blind, since she might not have been able to disguise her face as successfully as her voice, Madame de Beaumont looked up suddenly and said:

"I hear Wanda."

Wanda it was who came in, shy, pale, and once more evidently doubtful of the reception she might meet with. Finding no change of manners in the others, her restraint partly wore off, but plainly she was not altogether at her ease. She read as usual to Madame de Beaumont, to whom the change of voices was a refreshment. Presently the Baroness went out of the room, and brought back the coffee with her own hands. Wanda had noticed the same thing before, but had always imagined it might be

a little fancy of the house. Now that Martha had told her how small the establishment was, she understood its meaning and turned red. The coffee seemed as if it would choke her. Frau von Tellenbach stayed very little in the room when Wanda was with her mother; again it flashed upon the girl that she snatched the opportunity to carry out some of the menial work which Martha told her she was obliged to share. Wanda could not keep her thoughts from following her, and Madame de Beaumont at last said suddenly:

“You are not thinking of what you are reading, my child, for your words say one thing and your voice another. Never mind; so long as you do not insist upon knitting, I do not mind what we do. Let us talk a little instead.”

“Oh, madame,” said Wanda, almost crying, “I was only reflecting what a good person the Baroness must be.”

“That she is! Have you only just found it out?” asked Madame de Beaumont amused. “And she has a good husband and a good son. Nobody knows what a comfort Rudolf has been to us always—from his babyhood, I believe. It seems hard not to have him with us; but he had always his own ideas, and could not quite deliver them over to his mother’s

keeping. I suppose he is carrying them out in England."

"Does the Herr Baron speak of coming back?" asked Wanda, looking down.

"No," said the grandmother, with a sigh. "He does not talk of that, nor does he tell us much about his work, because he says the countries are so different. I suppose that must be so, and that we must wait and be patient. Whatever he does, I have no fears that he will not succeed. Perhaps he will marry an English heiress, which would please Elisabeth, though to my thinking the girls are stiff and ungenial. However, we shall see. Now tell me about yourself. You have not been here for a week; has that aunt of yours kept you away?"

"No, madame," faltered Wanda. It was on her tongue to pour out what she had heard, but she refrained with a sudden rush of understanding how much was kept from Madame de Beaumont, and how anxious her son and his wife were to spare her pain. "I thought, perhaps, I came too often."

"Do not think such foolish things again then, my child. And now run out and ask Joanna whether the Herr Baron told her he might be late this evening? I had forgotten."

There was no Joanna in the household. Wanda went slowly, longing yet fearing to meet the

Baroness. She encountered Lisa, and asked for her mistress.

"She is occupied," Lisa said, mysteriously. "If the gracious Fräulein wishes to speak with her, I can say so."

The girl said "Yes," with an effort, and waited nervously until she heard Frau von Tellenbach's quick step coming along the passages from the kitchen.

"Do you want me?" she said, shaking her keys. "Nothing is the matter?"

"No, nothing here. But oh! I am so unhappy! I have been hearing things."

"What things? Come into this room."

"About my uncle and—and Rothwald. It is not true, is it, Frau Baronin, that he is trying to get hold of the Schloss? Oh, I can hardly bear even to say the words! Martha told me. She declares that he holds securities—a mortgage. I do not understand what it can be; but I know very well that if it is owing to my father, he never, never would have dreamt of such an act. Pray tell me that it is not true."

The Baroness looked at her and answered somewhat evasively.

"Plenty of things are talked about which become exaggerated in the process, my dear Wanda."

"If you would only tell me that it is not true," repeated the girl, impetuously. "I have not dared come near you since I heard it, because I felt it is so wicked and unjust that I fancied you would hate me. Is it true?"

Frau von Tellenbach signed that it was.

"Oh, what can I do! I will go to him; I will say anything in the world that you tell me."

"What can anyone do?" said the Baroness quietly. "My good Wanda, do you think all your saying would affect him if he is determined? He will take his own way, and we women are helpless. But, see! We all know it is not your fault, and you must not stay away, for then you deprive my mother of one of her few pleasures. By the way, beware that you never speak to her on this subject."

"Oh, no; I would not for the world. I only read."

"Precisely. That is quite safe."

The Baroness was turning away, when Wanda, crimsoning as she spoke, said:

"Would you be offended if I asked a great favour?"

"If I cannot grant it, certainly I shall not be offended."

"It is about Martha. She is not happy where she is; I don't think she will ever be happy where

she has no work to do. Besides, it irritates my aunt that she should be so near the house."

"Perhaps the Pfarrer could tell us of some lodgings; or have you tried for those at Frau Weit's?"

"I thought—perhaps——"

"Well, what terrible thing did you think?"

"This is such a great house," stammered Wanda, looking round; "it would be such a kindness if you would let me keep her here. Then I should ride up, send Miranda back, and walk home with Martha. And if you will allow her to do needle-work, and help the others, she will be quite happy again. But of course I know it is a very great favour I am asking," she added, eagerly.

Frau von Tellenbach never coloured, but when much moved she had a habit of knitting her hands together, and this she now was doing.

"It would be your needle-work?" she asked, at last.

"Oh, if you please," assented Wanda, hurriedly, only anxious to secure the first step. "I have a great deal more than that new girl of mine can manage, and she is so slow and disobliging. Gracious lady, you will give poor Martha a home, will you not?"

"It would be such an extraordinary arrangement," said the Baroness, very slowly.

"But so good for both of us, that I think you will consent."

"What will my husband say. Ah, Wanda, it is not of yourself you are thinking."

"No, of Martha. It will make her happy again, and I shall not hear constant complaints. She may come, may she not?"

The Baroness suddenly turned and kissed her. If it cost her much to yield, it was before no half-hearted urging, for plainly Wanda's whole heart was set upon it; but she felt, almost with shame, that she could not speak, and that for the present, at least, it must stand in the light in which Wanda placed it. Even while giving this tacit consent she wondered at herself; but in truth she was changed, and the strain of her present life was so wearing, that she found it impossible not to snatch at anything like relief, and to let pride go.

Wanda went home lighter hearted. It was but a small thing, to be sure, but yet it was something; and Martha, to whom she unfolded her views, entered into them heart and soul.

"As to what I eat, that'll never harm them," she said, triumphantly.

"And we will manage," insisted Wanda. "Every now and then you must have a nice basket from a farm. Who is there who could send you a couple

of chickens or a goose, and some good cheese, Martha?"

"Who? Why, gracious Fräulein, nobody!" exclaimed the old woman, staring.

"But there must be somebody. Think, now, some nice little country farm."

"But there is not. My cousin, who lives near Augsburg, would see me at my last crumb before she would send me a feather off one of her chickens, let alone a goose indeed."

"What is her name?"

"Zimmermann. Widow Zimmermann of Ambach. But the gracious Fräulein need not expect miracles," Martha added, shaking her head as Wanda wrote it down.

"She will send if she is paid, I suppose?"

"Ah, dear Heaven, I had never thought of that!"

"And you need never think of it again," Wanda declared with decision. "Every now and then there will come a little present for you from your good cousin, and the chickens must be eaten. That is all, remember."

CHAPTER XII.

WINTER that year seemed to be setting in with extraordinary earnestness. By the middle of October the business of stripping the trees of their leaves was at an end, biting winds were at work, and there were even sharp snow-storms here and there, which called forth prophecies of unusual cold in Bavaria. Wind or rain, snow or frost, Wanda never failed to go up to the Schloss every second or third—latterly every second—day. Having had her eyes opened to the state of affairs, she now saw everything that was painful in their position, each humiliation, and each privation, more keenly than they saw it themselves. Tracing her uncle's hand in every hardship, and acutely aware that it was to him that the peculiar sharpness of the trial was due, she felt as if she could not do enough, and longed for better means of showing her devotion. By a hundred little devices, as ingeniously arranged as disguised, she tried to soften, if not the greater, at least the lesser troubles. But a few months ago a careless girl, taking her blessings as her due, and if

not selfish, certainly not self-sacrificing, she was now thinking of and planning for others all day. This thinking, it is true, was considerably influenced by her affections, so that those for whom they were not exercised did not derive much benefit, and she and Frau Jacob passed through many stormy scenes. The battles generally related to others. Though she had a high spirit, Wanda was nervous, and an encounter with her aunt generally left her pale and trembling, even if she had held every inch of ground; so that where only her own comforts were concerned she preferred yielding and avoiding the conflict.

Meanwhile her plans were ingenious. For one thing, she knew that the Baroness, though she did not any more than others visit the poor in their own homes, had been always in the habit of sending them relief through the Pfarrer. Wanda took money to her with the entreaty that she would ask him to lay it out, and begged her not to let him know from whom it came, lest he should mention it before her aunt, and bring a storm on her head. It was a little piece of patronage which the Baroness loved.

Wanda was indefatigable in creating such innocent little devices, but was all the time painfully aware that they did nothing towards alleviating the great trouble which every day brought closer. With

regard to this, was she not altogether helpless? She faintly hoped not. She had made up her mind not to irritate her uncle while he had not fully declared his hand, but to wait and watch, and then make such an appeal as she did not think he could reject. At any rate she said so to herself, though her heart sank while she said it. She was beginning to awake to a perception of hitherto unknown veins of hardness in his character. But she had sufficient confidence in herself to be persuaded that her own courage would rise with the demand upon it, and she hoped the Professor might be better or that help would come. Meanwhile she remained keenly on the look out for signs to show how the wind blew. Her uncle gave her none: once or twice when she spoke of the Von Tellenbachs, and alluded with intention to something which would be done at the Schloss in the following spring, he made no remark beyond his inevitable and rasping "Yes, yes," which left her as completely as ever in the dark. Frau Jacob was less guarded. Retort and taunt were irresistible to her: she could not miss an opportunity of flinging them. Who were the Von Tellenbachs? A petty provincial family of whom no one had ever heard beyond an area of twenty miles; poor beggars, only just able to keep a roof over their heads. Indeed, that would not be theirs

much longer, and it would be a good thing for Lauterthal when they were out of the place, and others put there who would entertain and do something for the neighbourhood.

“What neighbourhood?” asked Wanda maliciously.

“That is your ignorance. You are pleased to be patronised by people you think grand. The Frau Hauptmann will tell you you know nothing about really good society.”

“So?” said the young girl looking at Frau Schmidt, who coloured.

If Wanda had been cooler at this time she must have been amused at the tangled perplexities in which Frau Schmidt used to involve herself. She was so afraid of Frau Jacob, and so little dared to venture on an independent opinion, that she agreed roundly to this and that, and was led to approve of actions quite contrary to the laws of the divinity whom she worshipped—good society. It was true that, in spite of her cynical speeches, Frau Jacob had also the utmost veneration for that unknown power, and was constantly referring to it and requiring information. But she could not brook contradiction, and Frau Schmidt found to her cost that it was easier to act as chorus than instructor, and that

the only comments of which Frau Jacob approved were those strongly tinged by flattery.

She would very gladly have made little appeals for sympathy to Wanda when they happened to be alone.

"One cannot always be contradicting and explaining!" she would say plaintively. "Unfortunately your dear aunt has such intensely sensitive feelings that it is almost impossible to avoid hurting them, and really she is absurdly punctilious. For instance, one can never dare walk for a step on her right hand."

"Who is my dear aunt?"

"Best Wanda, you are joking! You have but one, so far as I know."

"I suppose you were alluding to Frau Meyer. Don't you think surnames the most advisable for use, except between near relations?" said the girl, who hated to be called "best Wanda," and was very sore with Frau Schmidt.

"You have grown particular, Fräulein!" said Frau Schmidt, colouring.

"Yes, I think we have all changed," answered Wanda bitterly.

Being so friendless she was perhaps unwise in alienating even so poor and shallow a nature, but it irritated her to find Frau Schmidt, who when her

aunt was present was cold and distant, trying to approach nearer when they were alone. She was young enough to expect whole-heartedness in every one, whether for good or evil.

At Rothwald each advancing day the dark cloud drew nearer. The Baron tried to shut his eyes to its possibilities; his wife, broken-hearted when she thought of her son, could not get them out of her mind. Wanda was the only person who closely watched her, and she sometimes thought the intensity of the strain would drive her mad; the trial was so terrible of having to keep up altogether before her mother-in-law, or of having to console her husband when fits of violent grief, as unreasonable in their extremes as his hopefulness, shook him to exhaustion.

She very rarely complained, but once said to Wanda:

"You can never know how I long for the luxury of breaking down just for a day or two. I have always said one might be cheerful at all times; now I begin to believe that my words are turned into scourges."

"You would be happier if you would yield," Wanda said, tenderly. "Why should they not know something of what you suffer? At any rate, why force yourself to smile and chat?"

"Because Hermann is so used to see me as I am, that he would give way altogether if I only did so for an hour. No, it would not do. When I have time I get away for a little and cry; but it is not often, and it would not be ever if it were not for your excellent Martha. She spares me a great deal, and, happily, I am strong. I could bear more, in order to keep our mother happy."

"Yes," said Wanda, hesitatingly.

"You do not think she has any suspicion? God forbid!"

"No. But try as you may, she can hardly but be conscious of something, and I think—ah, gracious lady, you must forgive me—I think I would always rather share the suffering of those I loved than be shut out."

"Because you are young," said Frau von Tellenbach, stroking Wanda's beautiful hair. "But if you were old and blind?"

"Then I think the more need to be one with those about one."

The Baroness sighed and took up her knitting.

"Perhaps you are right, and it might have been better, but I don't know; and now, while everything is so uncertain, one must keep her in the merciful darkness until the blow is proved to be really inevitable. I cannot regret her ignorance. But there

is another, Wanda, who should have been told long ago."

"Baron Rudolf?" cried the young girl, involuntarily. "Do you mean that he does not know?"

"My husband will not allow it. He is so sanguine, my good Hermann, that he can persuade himself into anything, even to believing in the——"

She stopped suddenly in her sentence, but Wanda none the less understood, by the pang in her own heart, that it was to her uncle she was going to allude. After a silence she said in a low voice:

"Why not write yourself to your son, gracious lady? He ought not to be in ignorance."

"I cannot. I might certainly do so, but it would vex my husband terribly."

"Need he know?"

The Baroness turned towards her suddenly.

"Ah, my child," she said, "we have our little secrets from others, even from Rudolf; but between ourselves—never! I have never hidden anything from him, nor he from me since we were betrothed, and I will not—no, even for this I will not now begin!"

She was much shaken, for as she spoke there were tears in her eyes, and indeed, before this,

Wanda had noticed how gentle and patient she had grown with her husband. In old days, although she had never openly opposed him, a little air of superiority had been apparent in her manner, indulgent, it might be, but unmistakably there. This had quite vanished, and if he broke into one of his, to say the truth, somewhat long-winded stories, she never now did what she used to do, skilfully turn the subject in order to escape the tedium of its ending. Wanda used to wish she would, but then her heart smote her.

"No," continued the Baroness, "and I daresay that Hermann is right, and that if our dear son is doing as well as we hope, it would unsettle him to hear of our difficulties. He might throw up everything to come to us."

"But if—if anything happens—he must know."

"Ah, yes. Whenever we see that it is inevitable we must tell him. What a shock!" cried the mother, raising her tearful eyes.

"Oh, tell him now, then he will have time for preparation. He may be able to think of some plan."

"I am sure myself that it would be better, but I cannot go against Hermann's express wishes. Only last night he repeated them. If only Rudolf could hear by other means!"

Wanda flushed. She fancied there might be a meaning in the words.

They returned to her as she walked rapidly down the hill with Martha. A bitter wind was blowing, but there was little appearance of cloud in the sky, and the sun was sinking, a red ball. It looked as if cold, and steady cold, were coming in, and Martha noticed it.

"The sleighs will soon be out if it goes on like this. It is very cold in the Schloss, gracious Fräulein, and my heart pains me when I see the noble lady look pinched and chilled, for she has no better herself than she gives others, *na!*"

"But with all those woods there must be fuel!" cried Wanda.

"The Herr Baron is selling every stick he can, and what he can't sell he can't afford to cut," returned the old woman.

"I am afraid your cousin would never send you a load of wood?"

"Trust her," Martha answered, holding up her hands. "*Na, gnädiges Fräulein*, one cannot pretend what one knows to be impossible. That last goose stuck in my throat when I took it to the Baroness and asked her to be good enough to accept it. She wanted to buy it from me; and, see here, we must not be in too great a hurry about the next.

If it came from any one but Widow Zimmermann!"

The days went by; November arrived. Wanda had paid her usual visits to the Schloss. One day she came home with what had been an idea grown into a determination. She went straight to her room and—as if she feared delay—sat down to write to the young Baron. At first her words came with difficulty; after a time a sort of desperation might have seized her from the manner in which she dashed off the last lines; but her cheeks were burning, and she felt that such an unusual and unmaidenly step must for ever sink her in Herr Rudolf's opinion. When she re-read the letter, it seemed utterly to fail in explaining her own interference, while it told of his mother's secret wish; but she dared not write another copy, when her resolution was so rapidly oozing out the tips of her fingers that it promised soon to fail altogether. She would not even postpone sending it till the next day, but, though tired with her walk, called her maid and started for the post-office. Unfortunately, on her way she met her uncle, who invited her to return with him. She replied that she must go to the post.

"You can send Maria," he naturally remarked.

"I prefer to take it myself."

He looked at her suspiciously, and she coloured. If she had been more at ease herself she might have noticed that there were signs of disturbance in his manner, but she was so anxious to escape further questioning, that she walked on rapidly, feeling as if an added humiliation had overtaken her. In the evening, however, she had sufficiently recovered herself to be conscious that something was wrong between husband and wife. All Frau Jacob's movements and words were stormy; she might have been labouring under suppressed excitement and indignation, while he preserved an immovable face, and took no notice of anything she said. After the others had gone to their rooms, Wanda heard disputing voices going on and on, and wondered what passions were astir.

But she was quite unprepared for the announcement her uncle made the next morning at breakfast. He had come back into the room as his wife and Frau Schmidt entered together and stood side by side at the great stove drinking their coffee. Wanda, who had swallowed her own and finished a milk roll, was crossing to the door when she caught Herr Jacob's last words to Frau Schmidt. Something or other was to be done, "when you are settled in at Wildberg."

Wildberg was a house belonging to the Meyers,

situated in the depths of the country, about twenty miles from a railway station—a wild sporting place, of which Herr Meyer had made but little use since he purchased it. Wanda had never been there. Her father had promised to take her some day, but the past summer had brought too much work for the day to have been found, and one of his last speeches to her had alluded playfully to his breach of good faith. The name, therefore, at once caught her attention, and she came back eagerly, saying:

“Wildberg! Is anyone going to Wildberg?”

Frau Schmidt looked from husband to wife for directions. Frau Meyer stared sullenly on the ground; her husband nodded slightly. She said in a tremulous voice:

“Yes, indeed. We are all going.”

“All!” Wanda repeated. “Who do you mean?”

“All but the Herr Uncle.”

“I cannot leave home at present,” said he, looking fixedly at her. “But you will do well enough without me.”

“I do not understand,” began Wanda slowly. “How can anyone go to Wildberg in this winter time? Uncle Jacob, I really decline.”

“Excuse me,” he said. “As you are under my charge I must request you to accommodate yourself to my household arrangements. If the others put

up with it, I fail to see why you should consider it so great a hardship."

"Pray do not ask it. It would be dreadful to me to go to Wildberg," she said earnestly. "Surely I could remain here with you, or if you would rather be alone, I might stay at the Schloss."

Frau Jacob spoke for the first time.

"I thought that was coming," she said angrily.

"*Bitte*, Uncle Jacob!" pleaded the girl.

"No. You will accompany your aunt."

There was something so harsh and iron-like in his tone that Wanda quailed before it. She would very gladly have defied him, and flatly refused to go, but had he not the power to insist? There was no doubt but that he meant what he said. Wanda felt all the irritation and impatience of weakness; she bit her lips, but the hot tears sprang to her eyes, nor could she steady her voice to the dignity she wished for as she said:

"It seems to me I might be allowed a choice."

"It seems to me that you have only to do what you are told," said Frau Meyer, looking at her from under her heavy brows. Wanda walked impetuously to the window. Herr Jacob addressed Frau Schmidt as to some arrangement; then, on his way to the door, he turned to his wife.

"The train starts to-morrow morning, Anna,

at 10.5. You will then reach Wildberg before dark."

To-morrow! Wanda's heart stood still. At the time when she was specially desirous to be on the spot in order to keep watch over the movements about the Schloss, and to be ready with an appeal which she flattered herself might have the more effect from her previous reticence, she was to be despatched out of the way. It was impossible not to believe that there was something intentional in a proceeding which had too many strange elements about it to be looked upon as natural. There was at least a probability in the idea that her uncle, for some reason or other, was averse from her being present when he carried out his schemes, and this probability made her the more miserable at having to go. To-morrow! There was barely time even to reach the Schloss once more, and when she rang the bell and ordered Miranda to be saddled, she was met by the intelligence that Miranda and her groom had that morning been sent to Wildberg.

Wanda's spirit, which had sunk to the verge of tears, rose again the instant she heard the words. It was snowing slightly, and the cold was intense. She detained her maid while she rapidly dressed herself in her furs, and then, telling the girl to join her outside, ran quickly down-stairs, and paced up

and down the road, waiting. She had a conviction that her going to the Schloss would be opposed, and was determined at once to gain a vantage ground. At any rate, she could not now be locked in. It all fell out very much as she expected. In a few moments Maria came running to say that the Frau Tante considered the weather too bad for them to go to Rothwald, and requested the Fräulein to return at once to the house.

"Tell Frau Meyer that I regret I cannot do as she desires. It is necessary that I should go," Wanda said firmly.

"Well, gracious Fräulein, I don't see how you can," answered Maria impertinently.

Wanda looked at her.

"Be good enough to repeat what I have told you to Frau Meyer."

The girl tossed her head and went back to the house. Presently she came out again.

"The honoured lady does not wish the gracious Fräulein to go, and she has forbidden me."

For all answer Wanda walked away. Cost what it might she was resolved to reach the Schloss; but the defiance of Frau Meyer's commands did not trouble her like the breach of social etiquette caused by her going alone. Every one she met looked at her curiously, or so she imagined, and her cheeks

burnt and her limbs trembled. A carriage clattered by, the Frau Generalin lifted her eyebrows in surprise, Minna Herschel stooped forward with her eyeglass brought to bear on the girl, who walked proudly on, determined not to give way, but hating the thought of the gossip which would be talked about her.

This was not the worst. Lisa stared when she opened the door of the Schloss, and the Baroness, who happened to be crossing the hall at that moment, came forward aghast to see Wanda alone. She would hardly listen to her reasons.

"No one to come with you!" she exclaimed. "My child, you should have pointed out the impropriety to your aunt, for even she must have perceived it."

"Oh, she perceived it!" said Wanda bitterly.

"And yet allowed you to come?"

"No, she would have liked to have locked me up," said the girl, half laughing, half crying. "It was I who insisted. How could I go away without coming once again?"

"You ought not to have come like this," repeated the Baroness, shaking her head. "A young girl cannot be too particular."

"What would she say if she knew I had written to Baron Rudolf?" thought Wanda with alarm.

She began to think she might as well have stayed at home, for Frau von Tellenbach would hardly talk of their own great anxiety in her desire to impress upon Wanda the dangers of such unconventional conduct. The girl, with her nerves highly strung, found it scarcely possible to endure the gentle, trivial reprimands. After a time she said anxiously:

“Gracious lady, promise that you will let me know if my uncle takes any definite step.”

“Where is the use?” said the Baroness sadly. “But I promise.”

Wanda’s eyes glowed. “I feel it will never be permitted,” she said with earnestness.

The Baroness’s own heart was heavy with anxiety. She was certain that Wanda was quite powerless, and her own convictions took the most gloomy colouring. But the girl seemed suddenly to have put away her fears. She chatted, laughed, and either by force or fair means brought her old cheerfulness to bear upon Madame de Beaumont and the Baron. She made wild plans of escaping from Wildberg on Miranda, which, after the escapade of to-day, seriously alarmed the Baroness. Do what she would, it was impossible to avoid tearful farewells, but her address managed to extract some of

the pain. Martha went back with her and received close injunctions.

The next morning at 10.5. the Meyer family started for Wildberg. Maria was left behind, and Wanda only saw her aunt's maid at the station.

CHAPTER XIII.

IF Rudolf's path at this time could not be described as strewn with roses, it may fairly be allowed that an occasional rose smiled up at him at intervals, and that these rare blossoms were invariably connected with the Rectory. Possibly Miss Edmunds was touched by the unexpected simplicity with which he had sought and found employment in the schools she mentioned to him. If she had thrown him upon such uncongenial tracks from a lurking desire to see of what stuff he was made, she began to repent as soon as she found that he was seriously adopting her suggestions. Her repentance took the not unusual form of scolding someone else, and in this case the someone else was her nephew.

"How could you let him do such a thing? A horrid poky little school at Notting Hill!"

"I consider that he showed a most proper spirit," said the Rector gravely.

"No spirit at all! But it was your fault, Arthur. And, of course, it is very undesirable for S. Matthew's."

"Why, Celia?"

"Why? Why because it is your business to keep up your organist, social position and all. If he had not been in such a hurry one could have given him really good introductions. It is very provoking of him," she said, smiling.

By this it will be seen that Celia's interest had not diminished. Rudolf had played on the Sunday, not brilliantly, but firmly and with taste; nor was there much doubt that the troublesome boys would find him masterful. Celia was gratified that her prophecies had not turned out badly; but, to do her justice, she would have held to him even if he had proved no phoenix but a failure.

"There is something pathetic in that big fellow living in this solitary manner in the heart of a foreign city. I am sure there is a story at the back of it. Do you think he has given his real name?"

"Celia!"

"Arthur! It is delightful to be able to shock anyone so easily. I thought people in these days had quite got over being shocked. Nothing made

any impression upon Constance or Tom. Why should he not take another name if it is convenient to him?"

"It would greatly annoy me to think it of the organist of S. Matthew's."

"Oh!" said Celia, putting her head on one side and looking at him with a smile. "And what may the Rector of S. Matthew's be going to do to-day?"

"Schools, two meetings, arranging with district visitors, seeing Walker—I've a good deal on hand. Don't wait luncheon."

"But I shall," she said with decision. "Be good enough to remember that I only engaged to come and take care of you on condition that you attended to your meals. I expect you to be a man of your word."

"My dear Celia—the parish!"

"No, Arthur. I have nothing to do with the old women. My business is to look after you."

"Old Jane Brooks says you're the very nicest lady she ever knew," said her nephew, a broad smile suddenly breaking out on his face.

"Of course I am. And the most conscientious. Don't spoil my temper by making me wait for my luncheon."

When he had gone, Celia went out of the room for half an hour, in which space her active and

energetic spirit got through an astonishing amount of work. She then, in spite of her protestations, put on her bonnet and carried off a can of soup and a small pudding to an old woman and a sick child, who lived in one of the most miserable alleys of the district; came back with a bunch of flowers she had bought at the corner of a street, which she immediately set to work to arrange; finally, sat down on a low black basket chair, took her writing materials on her lap, and began a letter.

“Really, Constance,” it said, “I am inclined to believe that I have at last found the hole which I was intended to fill: certainly I never before felt a conviction that I was much wanted. Tim, to be sure, used me as a horse on rainy days, and I dare say your maternal spirit thinks anyone might have been content with such a privilege; and I own I believe the baby preferred the faces I made for her benefit to the contortions of anyone else. But, after all, a wooden horse suited Tim better, and the baby thought a gurgling india-rubber doll ever so much wittier than my highest flights. Here you don’t know how invaluable I am. And you were quite mistaken in saying that to come and look after Arthur I ought to be old and stupid. If I were old and stupid I should not be of the least use in the world. As it is I domineer over him gloriously, in-

sist upon his having a proper amount of food and a tidy cook, and administer a wholesome series of little surprise shocks, which are quite as beneficial as gentle galvanism. Then, by way of encouragement, I stand up valiantly for him and with him when he is bent upon doing the S. Matthew's people good against their will, and sometimes—here's heroism for you!—don't even tell him that I think he has made a mistake. Did you ever expect that of me? Of course he is rushing boldly into all manner of reforms, and then weighing his very soul down by taking to heart anything that anybody says against them. That is Arthur all over, as we know. But what nobody, I believe, really knew, at any rate what we have not half appreciated, is his wonderful goodness and unselfishness. If I think about it too much I become so ashamed of myself that I am inclined to tell him he is an angel, which in our respective positions would never do. So I have to wipe away a furtive tear, and scold him instead. As for all the things you intended me to miss, I won't say that every now and then there does not come a yearning, but it grows more faint. The air is not so bad, and I am astonished at the fragments of society which turn up. Some day when you are in London we will collect them together, and you and Tom shall judge for yourselves. I'm not afraid.

My first favourite is a big German, whom Arthur has adopted for organist without knowing anything about him, and whose other occupation is teaching his own language at second-rate schools. He will take you in to dinner. *I'm not afraid.* But I suppose there is no chance of your being up yet? What is Dick doing? Has he come back?"

She wrote another page, then put her letter into an envelope and directed it to the Hon. Mrs. Carmichael, Freshwater, Isle of Wight, lingering a little over the address, which brought with it a vision of open downs and flying scud of cloud, swept in by a brisk salt wind from the sea. With this in her mind, her eyes fell upon a dismally mottled plane tree lifting itself above a brick wall blackened by smoke, its leaves hanging limply in the heavy autumnal languor. At this moment Rudolf was announced. He came in quickly, and Celia's face brightened.

"You are just in time to do me a service," she said smiling.

"What is that, madame?" asked the young German eagerly. He always called her madame, perhaps from an idea that it belonged to her position in the Rector's house.

"Oh, it is done. There is nothing so silly as to let oneself dream of contrasts, and I was doing it."

"Oh, I know very well what that means," he said in a tone of great sympathy. "I am often obliged to be very severe upon myself in not permitting it."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"I suspect your contrasts would be worse than mine."

"I think the worst of all are between what you planned for yourself and what you have got," he answered, evading the direct point of the question. Celia felt herself to be pertinacious as she said:

"Yes, I told you you were ambitious. Too ambitious for those miserable schools."

"Oh, not now, madame!" he declared eagerly. "I came to bring you a piece of good news. Owing to your kindness in writing, I am engaged three times a week at Kensington. That is a capital thing for me."

"Better than the other, I suppose," said Celia, shrugging her shoulders. "You must throw over that other: I feel horribly guilty about it."

"On the contrary, I am grateful," Rudolf said gravely. "The principal is a kind woman. Besides, you cannot tell what a first engagement seems when one is out of heart. And it is all owing to you and Mr. Edmunds."

"Oh, no; to the white mice," she said smiling. For by this time she had heard the story, and indeed seen them living in clover in Rudolf's room. "However, you need not tell me that all this contents you."

"Contents me!" he repeated slowly. "No, that would not be the truth, certainly. But it gives me time."

"You have other dreams?"

"Oh, yes, I have other dreams," he said with a smile. "They have so long been dreams that I shall soon expect them to turn into realities. We Germans, you know, are reported to be a patient people."

"I wonder——" she began, and then paused. But as he was looking at her, as if waiting to be enlightened as to her wonder, she said a little confusedly: "Most young men's dreams are mixed up with romance, let me give a good wish or two to yours."

He made haste to disclaim. "That is not my case."

"Oh, well, you must still keep the good wishes," said Celia lightly and perhaps not displeased, though she would have liked a fuller confidence. "Will you have any more books?"

"Not yet, madame, I thank you, and I must not

disturb you longer. Would you like me to post your letters?"

"Thank you," said Celia, putting them into his hand as he took his leave. As he walked along, not homewards, for it was his morning at the Seminary, his mind naturally ran upon their last words. He had not cared to talk about those literary ventures of his, which indeed were too completely one-sided to give much food for talk; but his present employment, though it could not be described as success, seemed once more to give him heart to hope for success. Then his thoughts reverted to what Miss Edmunds had said, and to his answer. Was it absolutely correct? Did no echo of those words "*Auf Wiedersehn*" come back through the roar and rumble of the London streets? Why, there was not a day on which he had not remembered them. And yet Rudolf felt a bitter conviction that he was acting like a fool in suffering the recollection to haunt him. He knew nothing of the extremity which was overtaking Rothwald, but he knew that he was himself in no plight to support a wife, and his pride was as strong as ever.

Just then he reached a red pillar, and in the act of posting Celia's letters, his eyes fell upon the address to Mrs. Carmichael. It gave him a touch

of unpleasant amazement, for though he might welcome new friends in his present position, he was conscious of shrinking from old ones; but he consoled himself with the thought that Dick's sister-in-law might be a chance acquaintance only of Miss Edmunds, and that at any rate he was too insignificant a personage to be likely to figure in a letter.

CHAPTER XIV.

Two or three weeks later Mrs. O'Connor, discovering that her own store of sugar was exhausted, had just been up to see whether she could find what she wanted in her lodger's canister, and, with the result in her hands, was standing in the passage watching with some perplexity the movements of her latest acquisition, a hedgehog, when Rudolf came in to look for letters before going to the choir practice.

"I've niver a thought of keeping the craythur, sir," she said apologetically, "but the blackbeetles is gettin' the upper hand of us so intirely, that I hadn't the heart to send Pat away wi' the flea in his ear he desarved, for I've tould him agin and

agin to bring no more of his bastes to this house. An' sure, this here's a wonderful craythur, an' to see him with the puppy would make ye die of laughin'."

Rudolf, who had read his letter, turned briskly round.

"Pat's beasts bring luck, Mrs. O'Connor," he said. "I've had a piece of good news."

A German newspaper had accepted his article, and was ready to consider others. If they gave satisfaction, he might be employed as London correspondent. It was a step on the ladder at the foot of which he had been kept so long, and his pleasure was extreme. He went slowly up the shabby staircase with a flush of triumph on his face, which seemed out of proportion to the news, but which really belonged to the vista he saw opening before him. It was, perhaps, characteristic of Rudolf that though absorbed with thoughts of what might be done, he was not unmindful of the rapturous greeting which the bullfinch as usual bestowed upon him, and that he immediately pulled some green stuff out of his pocket, and twisted it between the bars of the cage. But for the first time he was a few minutes late for the choir practice, and when afterwards he went into

the Rectory for supper, Mr. Edmunds nervously alluded to it.

"You must excuse me," he said, "but I am a great stickler for punctuality."

"I am very sorry, very sorry indeed," Rudolf said frankly.

"One cannot keep up one's influence unless by attending to one's own rules."

"It shall not happen again. A letter made me forget the time."

Celia glanced at him.

"You look," she said softly, "as if one of your dreams had come true."

"That is just what has happened," Rudolf said, with happy surprise in his voice.

The Rector stared from one to the other, not understanding what they were talking about. Rudolf's unpunctuality had been a trifling lapse, but it was the sort of thing which always annoyed him, and made him more doubtful of his own powers of ruling than many larger matters. Celia meanwhile was feeling much interest in her ventures.

"The white mice must certainly be good fairies in disguise," she said smiling.

"It was a hedgehog this time," said Rudolf thoughtfully. "I don't care how many more come,

but I am afraid the house will hardly hold them. Perhaps Pat is the conjuror after all."

"I saw something wriggling in Pat's pocket this evening. I really cannot allow him to bring those creatures of his to the practice," said Mr. Edmunds, spreading a thin piece of toast. "I shall tell his father so."

"Perhaps you would allow me to speak to Pat himself," said Rudolf, with a great desire to shield his first benefactor. "He is not at all a bad boy, and has a very good voice. You would be surprised to find how much he has picked up about these animals of his, and how much observation he shows. It seems to me quite wonderful, living here in a great city. Now, at my home in Bavaria——"

He stopped, having said a little more than he intended. Celia came quietly to his rescue.

"Yes; one feels as if such a boy ought to be got into the country. In Germany, of course, there is more uncultivated wild country, more——"

"More vestiges of the old savage life. Yes, that is so. Pat would be wonderfully happy there."

"I think of getting up some lectures on the different countries this winter," said the Rector with a sudden inspiration. "You would be the very person to take Germany."

Rudolf smiled. "I don't know. I might say too much," he said in a full voice.

"Oh, it will be an excellent beginning," said the other, taking out his note-book to make a careful entry. "By the way, Celia, wasn't it Bavaria where Dick Carmichael went this summer?"

It seemed to Rudolf that the silence lasted an extraordinary length of time. In reality it was scarcely for a moment that Celia paused before saying:

"Yes, I think so. Dick is always whisking about somewhere, so that it is no wonder if his movements are difficult to chronicle."

"Oh, it was, I am certain. I recollect asking for his address for some reason or other, and I believe I have it still somewhere. Why, surely you must remember?"

"It does not matter, does it?" she said impatiently. "He has been at fifty places since. If you keep Dick's addresses, you must require a special 'Where is it?' for them alone. But, Arthur, I believe that faithless Wraxall has never sent the printed list of services."

"Then I must go for them directly you have finished, Tellenbach," said the Rector in consternation. "It will take me past your door, and you

may as well give me the benefit of your company."

Rudolf's cheerfulness had deserted him. He scarcely answered his companion as they walked along the street, but the Rector was full of his own schemes, and wanted no response beyond an occasional monosyllable; while, even in the midst of thought, the young German could not fail to be struck with the self-devotedness and single-heartedness of the man, whose one aim was to be the helper of his people.

Once alone, Rudolf set to work to consider whether the impulse which kept him silent when Dick's name was mentioned was justifiable. It was an unexpected situation in which he had suddenly been placed, though, if he had stayed to moralise, he might have remembered that where any, even the smallest amount of concealment has been admitted, such situations should never be unexpected. He had been conscious of colouring, and knew that if he had been obliged to speak, words would have been difficult. But no direct question had been put, and he could not see that a moral necessity to tell his tale was placed before him. It was not Dick himself whom he minded, for that sort of pride was slipping away, but the fear that through Dick the home people might hear his true position. As for

the Edmunds', he argued that what they saw was the only part of his life he cared to hide, and if they accepted him as he was, no possible harm was done. He therefore determined still to hold his peace, unless anything turned up which would make silence untruthful, or open the idea of his being Dick's friend to the Edmunds'. He little imagined that to Celia's swift intuition it was already clear, or that at this very moment she was writing a letter to Dick, and smiling over her discovery. The moment her nephew spoke she remembered the name of Von Tellenbach, and Dick's account of the young Baron as a capital fellow. Without looking directly at Rudolf, she contrived through a glass to perceive that he changed colour, and needed no more to convince her. But she did not do more in her letter than ask Dick to come and see them one day, leaving what might come of this to the chapter of accidents. Dick, who was perhaps not sorry for the invitation, answered that he would turn up on Tuesday night, "fogs at your end permitting," he wrote, to Celia's indignation.

If not a dense fog, there had been a November atmosphere of raw mist, through which Rudolf had been tramping all day. When evening came he was writing in his room, which looked less shabby and more cheerful when fire and gas were at work

upon it than when a dismal daylight spread its gloom. The bullfinch and the white mice had their cages covered, the puppy was stretched before the fire, and Rudolf was writing vigorously in a cloud of smoke, when a peal came on the bell, a hasty step on the stairs, and Dick burst uninvited into the room. Rudolf's first sensation could be of nothing but welcome; the sight of his friend's cheery face left no room for the remembrance, that, in bringing him, fortune had played him a scurvy trick, and pulled him neck and crop out of his hole.

"So this is why I have never had a line from you, and nobody knew where you'd hidden yourself!" Carmichael exclaimed vehemently. "I pitched into my father for not having looked after you better, but he vows he was always expecting you to turn up, or thought you'd gone home or something. What have you been doing with yourself, old fellow? How are you getting on? Celia would tell me nothing, except that I might come and find out for myself."

"I wasn't sure you'd own me—east Leicester Square," said Rudolf with a laugh.

"That's rubbish, let me tell you. Why, Celia lives east of Leicester Square, doesn't she?"

"What has she to do with you?"

"Celia? Why, she's my sister-in-law's sister. There's a connection for you. Haven't I ever talked to you of Celia?"

"Never."

"That's odd," said Dick with a curious intonation in his voice. Rudolf noticed it and wondered what it meant.

"What are you doing here?" asked the other man the next moment.

"Playing the organ at S. Matthew's, and teaching German at two or three schools," said Rudolf, fixing his eyes on Dick.

"Pooh, that's absurd!"

"It's a fact, however, and one for which I am grateful."

"Then we will soon put a stop to it," said Dick, with the easy confidence which used to impress Rudolf. It was not very difficult to turn him to his own experiences, and to relating what had happened since he left Lauterthal. It was all much more picturesque than anything his companion had to tell. He had been at Lubeck, he had painted a dozen pictures there, and meant to go back some day and paint a dozen more. Denmark and Holland—there seemed to have been no lack of delight to him in the places, from the enthusiastic spirit in which he spoke of them. Rudolf was observing and

listening curiously. So far as he could see, the shadow of Wanda's rejection had not long weighed down Dick's habitual cheerfulness, but he was keenly on the watch for more direct signs. They were so long in coming that at last he abruptly asked Dick whether he had heard of the loss of the Waldemar. Dick stared. He was quite unaware that Herr Meyer had been on board, and expressed his sorrow.

"Oddly enough," he said, "this very day I heard an allusion to the Waldemar in the club. Two men were speaking of her, but I only caught the name. Poor Fräulein Wanda! what is she doing? Living on still with the objectionable aunt?"

Rudolf put his elbows on the table and leant forward heavily, looking at the pipe he held.

"I want to know one thing," he said.

"Out with it."

"Have you any thought of trying your fortune again with Fräulein Wanda?"

There was silence. Carmichael, who was standing, walked across the room and back to the table.

"No," he said presently.

"No? You mean that."

"Yes, I mean it. A little while ago I might have told you that I should never try my luck twice

in the same quarter, but that I don't say positively now, because circumstances open one's eyes. However, it's all one so far as Lauterthal is concerned. And, if you remember the opinion I gave you, you may agree with me that you weren't quite fair in letting me poach without informing me of the fact that I was poaching."

"Oh, that is nonsense!" said Rudolf almost angrily.

Dick looked at him and burst out laughing.

"What fellows you Germans are for holding on to the same notions!" he said. "Now bundle these interesting exercise books into a heap, and come back with me to the Rectory. I promised Celia I'd bring you, and I owe her something for her sharpness."

That evening opened Rudolf's eyes to one or two things. Mr. Edmunds was inclined to be nervous and fluttered over the discovery that his organist was Dick's friend, and in a very different social position in his own country to that which he held here, but Celia's light and skilful touch smoothed matters with a wonderful grace. She was in high spirits, standing up for S. Matthew's against all Dick's teasings. The two seemed on excellent terms with each other, Rudolf thought, though every now and then she appealed to him to take

her part against what she was pleased to call fine gentleman injustice. Once he answered with a good deal of warmth:

"I don't know whether it is what you consider uncivilised, but I think it was a good, a very good thing for me, when I came to live among the people here, who have been so kind to me."

"Even Mrs. Perkins," said Celia mischievously. For Mrs. Perkins was a widow with a daughter, who had developed a hitherto quite unsuspected taste for the organ, and consumed a great deal of the young man's time.

"Certainly Mrs. Perkins," he said gravely. She gave him a quick, smiling glance.

"I really believe you have a grateful mind, and that when you have gone away you will forget everything about us but our virtues."

"Gone away! But he is not going," said Mr. Edmunds, looking up.

"No, I am not going," said Rudolf with frank decision. "I have a great deal to do before I go."

"We shall see," said Celia, with a nod which did not convey much faith in his declaration. "Will you play to us a little now? I like to make sure of my good things."

"Yes, play," said Dick, jumping up and going to the piano.

Rudolf sat for a long time at the piano. He would have stopped before but that he fancied from an occasional murmur which reached him that Dick and Celia, if they were not attending to the music, were content to carry on an independent existence at that moment. Mr. Edmunds had gone down to his parish room. The drawing-room in which they sat was long and low; there was little light at the end where Rudolf was, and he could watch the fire light playing with pleasant indistinctness upon brass sconces and bits of fine old china. Without any conscious exercise of memory the notes fell softly from his fingers; wild forest songs of Mendelssohn's set the leaves rustling, the horns blowing; out from the grass and the swaying boughs little wood creatures ran startled across the path; then they all faded away, and a girl, laden with budding branches, and young and fresh as the spring itself, came blushing down the road. The picture was so extraordinarily distinct that he could have declared he never saw her so clearly as at that moment. Many things indeed came with the music, as the magical notes dropped daintily; by-and-by they gathered together with a tremulous sigh of chords, and whispered:

"So sagen wir, Auf Wiedersehn! Auf Wiedersehn!"

Rudolf got up rather abruptly and closed the piano. Celia began to thank him; her voice sounded odd, and not quite like herself, while Carmichael said in an injured tone:

"You have given us little enough, my dear fellow."

"Half-past eleven," returned Rudolf showing his watch. "I must go."

Dick and he went out together into the thick air, through which the blurred lights gleamed, and for a few minutes walked silently side by side. Then the elder man said with a laugh:

"Perhaps you understand now that there is no likelihood of my trying my fortune again with the Fräulein Wanda. I have always liked Celia."

Rudolf's first sensation was displeasure.

"Always?" he repeated gravely. "It is a pity you did not know that before."

Dick was too happy to be sensitive; he only laughed.

"Well," he said frankly, "I fancied Celia would have nothing to say to me, and that it might have been all a mistake. It is almost impossible to say how these things happen. The great point is that it should all come right at the last, eh?" Then, perceiving that Rudolf was still resentful for Wanda, he continued less lightly: "Upon my word, you did

not know your own mind so well that you have any right to fall foul of me!"

"I don't admit your argument," said the young man recovering himself, "but I allow I have no sort of right. And I am very, very glad that it is Miss Edmunds you are going to marry. It seems very strange—my coming here and all!"

The strangeness of it, and the contrast of the reality in which his friend found himself with the glowing prospects he had pictured for his benefit, had quite faded out of Dick's mind. He cheerfully wished him good-night, and went off in pursuit of a hansom.

The next morning when Rudolf came out of his little bedroom, a letter in a hand he did not recognise was lying on his breakfast table. He took it up, held it nearer to the gas to examine it closely, and was puzzled to see that it came from Lauterthal. When he opened it and looked at the signature his perplexity became extreme surprise and pleasure, while he was conscious that he ought to have been alarmed. But he rapidly read the scanty lines.

"Herr Baron,—Pray forgive me for writing to you without any one knowing that I do so. I am afraid there is great anxiety at the Schloss, and that my uncle is causing it by threatening to fore-

close some mortgage. You will understand this, though I cannot explain it. The Herr Baron wishes you to be spared until he knows more certainly, and the Baroness will not write in consequence, but she longs that you should be told, and that has made me venture to write. I beg of you to pardon me. With high consideration,

“WANDA MEYER.”

From the total absence of outward signs of emotion which Rudolf showed after reading this letter with its burden of bad news, he might have been accused of apathy. He remained quite still, the puppy taking advantage of his abstraction to dive into his bedroom, and to proceed to gnaw a boot with great deliberation and comfort. Rudolf's meditation ended by his placing the note inside his waistcoat, and by eating his breakfast. He then went off to the schools at which he was engaged, and with some difficulty persuaded them to cancel his engagement, which he might not have effected, had not fate thrown in his way a struggling compatriot whom he was able to suggest as a substitute. He had lost no time in all this, and it was still early when he reached the Rectory, and, Mr. Edmunds being out, was shown into Celia's room. She met him with a little blush, supposing he had

come to congratulate her, but the next moment read something in his face which led her to say quickly:—

“I am afraid you have had bad news?”

“I am afraid so,” said Rudolf simply. “At any rate I must find out.”

Celia looked down regretfully.

“And you mean to leave us?” she said, although he had not told her.

“Yes. Do you remember what you said last night? I shall begin to believe that you are a witch.”

“Or a Cassandra. Though I am a woman, I heartily wish I had not prophesied rightly. And what will Arthur do?”

“I am greatly distressed about the Church,” said Rudolf anxiously. “I have been racking my brains to think of some one.”

“Oh, don’t add to your own troubles by thinking about us,” Celia returned kindly. “You know I came here on purpose to be good for emergencies, and though I never meant to disclose it to you, yet, if worse comes to worst I can take the services myself. There!”

“I believe that you can do everything that is kind,” Rudolf said with all his heart. “May I say something more?” She nodded, and he went on,

"Dick told me last night: I can't say how glad I am. He is a lucky fellow."

"Thank you," said Celia gravely. "I hope some day you will let us send you our good wishes in return."

"That will never be."

She smiled.

"Remember what you have just acknowledged, and don't be too ready to discredit my predictions. Must you go?"

"If I really may without waiting to speak to Mr. Edmunds."

"Yes, I will manage everything. But Dick will be dreadfully sorry to miss you, particularly as I don't believe we ought to wish you to come back again."

"Whether I come or not, madame, I shall never forget your kindness," exclaimed Rudolf, and as he said the words, there was something like a tear in his eye, and Celia's heart warmed towards him when she saw it. She sent for a foreign Bradshaw, made out his route, and he had just left her when Dick arrived. She expected him to go off in pursuit as soon as she had explained what had happened, but Dick shook his head.

"I should only be in the way. The best friend a man owns is in the way when he wants to pay

his landlady quietly and get off without loss of time."

"I thought you would have cared to see your friend," said Celia indignantly.

Dick subsided into an easy-chair.

"Just now I prefer seeing you," he said coolly.

CHAPTER XV.

To arrive at Wildberg required first a railway journey of an hour and a half or thereabouts, during which time the line skirted, sometimes closely, sometimes at a distance, the broken outskirts of a great forest. Once, indeed, it ran directly through a spur of this which struck boldly away from the principal mass, but generally the great body of forest lay on one side, and the railway followed it, roughly speaking, in a parallel direction. At the end of the hour and a half a picturesque town was reached, where Wanda found they were to get out. The houses were curiously shaped and detached, with steeply-pitched red roofs, and a certain quaint isolation of character. There was a broad and shallow river, crossed by a long bridge: from a hill a Schloss dominated the town, the forest had fallen back, and only had the effect of a distant background. To Wanda's surprise, when they got out of the train, she saw that besides Gretchen, Frau Jacob's servant, they were accompanied by Hans Kaufmann, the hunchback. She had no fear of the

man, but his presence at such a time struck her as strange.

A carriage with a pair of horses was waiting at the station; they got in, Hans clambered on the box, and they drove away with much whip-cracking through the odd independent houses, across the bridge, and then for a little time by the side of the river, towards the forest. Wanda, who was on the watch for any signs which might enlighten her as to the reason of their journey, believed that her aunt was very angry with her husband for having forced it upon her. She sat sullenly silent in the train, and in the carriage complained bitterly of the hardship of leaving Lauterthal.

After a few miles, and when they had long lost sight of the river, they stopped for a few minutes at an inn, the centre of one or two houses which were still marked by their steep red roofs, and Hans went in and spoke privately to the landlord. From this point the road lay directly through the great forest into which they plunged.

In her present frame of mind it looked to Wanda indescribably dreary and desolate. The road itself soon became little better than a cart track, seamed with deep ruts and fissures, over which the carriage jolted with difficulty. The roads were hard with frost; it was easy to conceive that in wet weather,

or when the snow lay deep on the ground, they would be almost impassable. If every now and then they emerged into some space which might by courtesy be called a clearing, the relief which she momentarily felt changed to a shudder, so bleak and cheerless did it all look.

For eight or nine miles they drove through the forest, without a sign of human habitation being visible; at length the trees became less thick and they emerged on a stony country where herbage was scanty and scarcely afforded a living to the few lean goats which browsed here and there. There were some half a dozen miserable houses, and a small number of poverty- and cold-stricken people, but when they began to mount a steep hill even these remnants of population were left behind. Moreover, the scenery took broader lines and changed its character. It remained equally stern and forbidding-looking, but broken ground and patches of fir trees took away the charge of monotony, and presently the brawling sound of a river or brook could be heard, unmistakably forcing its way through stones. Almost immediately upon this they came in sight of the house, built of the grey stone of the district, and lying in a cleft of the hill, so as to be partially sheltered from high winds.

Their drive had been very silent, for Frau

Jacob had scarcely spoken to Wanda since her return from the Schloss the day before, and Frau Schmidt looked fairly frightened at the country in which she found herself. Wanda had time to consider her position and to argue that if her aunt came thus unwillingly, and treated the exile as such a terrible thing, there must be some important reason for the exile, and she could only think that her uncle must have desired to withdraw her from the neighbourhood of Rothwald, because it lay in her power to disarrange his plans. Having got hold of this idea she clung there, and made up her mind to do her best to baffle him.

As has been said, the house stood in a cleft of the rocky hill, facing south-west. But striking, even grand as was the situation, and beautiful as no doubt it might be with the summer sun shining softly on it, in this harsh season its barren bleakness struck a chill into any one who saw it for the first time. It was kept by an old couple and their daughter Rosa, a girl as smiling and good-tempered as her parents were the reverse, so that her very presence, her bright glossy plaits of hair and her blue eyes, gave a pleasant contradiction to the prevailing gloom.

All the way, Wanda's thoughts had turned hopefully to Miranda. "If it were necessary I could

certainly ride the twenty miles," she had said over and over again to herself as they drove through the dreary forest. She got hold of Rosa as soon as she could, and found that nothing was known of her favourite at Wildberg. Rosa shook her head, and was certain she had not arrived there. Wanda went in hot haste to Frau Meyer, and learnt that Miranda had only been sent half-way, and would come on when her uncle gave his directions.

The girl turned pale.

"But where is she?" she exclaimed vehemently. "How do I know she is properly cared for? I am sure we passed no house which looked fit for Miranda. I shall write to my uncle."

"Pray do. I advise you to rise a little earlier than usual to-morrow for that purpose."

Wanda went away with the irritating sense of powerlessness strong upon her. She was ashamed of the thought, yet could not help thinking that by putting Miranda out of her reach her uncle was providing against a sudden impulse on her part. How could she reach her?

The evening passed gloomily. Wanda wrote her letter and followed her aunt's advice as to early rising, determining to make sure of its going by taking it herself to the post-house, or whatever answered to it in this wild region. Going downstairs,

wrapped in furs, she found Rosa's mother piling wood into the great stove. The old woman stared at her.

"Where does one put the letters?" asked Wanda, "and where do they go?"

As to the where the woman shook her head, such matters being out of her province. For the when, Karl Fürst would call for them in the evening.

In the evening? So Frau Jacob had put her off for a day! It was possible she might not have known, yet she fancied there was malice in the injunction to rise early, and she was fretted by the conviction that she was meant to hold as little communication as possible with Lauterthal.

She went out and walked for some way along the road by which they had arrived the day before. It was a solitary spot, indeed. In summer, when birds might be darting here and there, the air busy with the hum of living things, and all the sweet growth of nature at cheerful work, such solitude might not be oppressive; now, in the bitterness of winter, when life seemed congealed or bound in iron fetters, when nothing was stirring except the poor branches or dead leaves beaten here and there by an icy wind, or the brook which with crisp cold clatter dashed down between its stones;

the bleakness of it all, and the strange absence of kindly things, struck sharp.

Wanda was at all times susceptible of cold, disliking its chill and desolation. She made her way over uneven ground to the brookside, and stood looking at it with a shiver. The sky was grey: every now and then a snow-flake or two whirled through the air, and was caught up again and tossed hither and thither, and made the sport of the wind, seemingly too small a thing ever to possess a power of its own. Wanda looked at them with a feeling which was half pity, half dislike.

Coming out on the road again, and giving a searching look along its course towards the forest, where it was lost many times only to reappear, a hard white streak without any moving object upon it to break its dreariness, she turned with a sinking of her heart to mount the hill again, and saw, coming down, Hans, the hunchback. He stopped when he reached her, as if expecting to be questioned, and she immediately asked him where was Miranda. The man's manner in answering her was grave, and unlike his old half-mockery.

"The gracious Fräulein must not allow that she knows it," he said, "but the mare is at the Wald-

haus, the inn she must have seen before we turned into the forest."

"How many miles away?"

"Ten."

Something made Wanda say impulsively:

"Hans, could you not fetch her? I could pay you well."

He shook his head.

"I could fetch her, gracious young lady; but without an order from the Herr, neither the groom nor the landlord would allow her to come."

She looked at the ground, and then at the forest.

"And perhaps you would not know your way?"

"Oh, I know my way well enough, for I lived in these parts in my youth. That is why the Herr sent me—or so he said," he muttered.

"And it is ten miles?"

"Ten miles, *mein gnädiges Fräulein*."

Wanda nodded, and was moving on, but turned and called to him again.

"Suppose I want to speak to you at any time, how can I do so?"

Hans reflected for a moment, before showing her a thorn-bush by the side of the road.

"Break this little branch downwards—so," he said, "and I will be here the next morning at this time."

"I wonder if you would really help me!" said Wanda, struck suddenly with her own imprudence. Hans looked at her as if he would have said something; she was not certain that he had not done so, but she caught no words, and he walked rapidly down the hill.

When Wanda reached the house, Frau Jacob and Frau Schmidt, slipshod and in the dingiest of morning gowns, were standing by the stove, sipping their coffee, and apparently pouring out tirades of mutual complaint. She said at once:

"You cannot have known the hours for the letters going, Tante Anna. A man takes them in the evening."

"Really? Well, it is certain that your letters can be of little consequence."

The girl bit her lip; it was useless to say more, for although she might irritate Frau Jacob, she could not avoid being irritated herself. Her heart sank as she looked round at the cheerless uncarpeted room, out of the windows at the grey coldness of the freer world, finally at the discontented faces of her companions. What could she do with herself the long day through? She had brought some books, and in the drawing-room there was an old piano, but she was restless and indisposed for

reading or music. With an effort she again addressed her aunt.

"*Bitte*, about Miranda. When is she coming?"

"You can ask your uncle."

"But I might send direct and order her to be brought."

"Where would you send?" said Frau Jacob with a sharp glance. "Besides, I am inclined to think that your orders would produce very little effect."

"I should like to know what independence I really possess," said Wanda, fixing her eyes steadily upon her.

"You can put that question also in your letter to your uncle."

"I think I had better apply to some one besides my uncle," retorted Wanda, remembering the Baron's words.

Frau Jacob flushed a dull red.

"Whatever you may do, have the goodness not to talk impertinently," she said angrily. It was one of those outbreaks in which Wanda felt herself humiliated by her own want of control. Her blood tingled, and when Frau Schmidt looked reproachfully at her, she looked haughtily at Frau Schmidt. Then she put down her cup and left the room. Frau Meyer flung herself into a chair.

"Really, I have to endure too much!" she exclaimed. "As if it were not bad enough to be banished to this dreadful place, but that girl must be saddled upon me!"

"I cannot understand the whole affair," said Frau Schmidt in a less subservient tone than she was in the habit of using, for in fact displeasure at her own wrongs was rapidly getting the upper hand. "The carriage has gone back again, this is the most terrible and alarming place I was ever in, and the idea of such a banishment never penetrated into my mind."

"Pray do not complain, to add to the disagreeables!" exclaimed Frau Meyer sharply. "Do you imagine I find it pleasant?"

"Then why did we come?"

"I have told you twenty times that it was a whim of my husband's, and that I could not persuade him out of it. He wished Wanda to be away from those people at the Schloss; he said there was too much mischief-making to please him. Certainly he might have sent her with you alone, which you might have preferred," she added spitefully.

"Never before have I been asked to come to such a place!" exclaimed the other, looking round and shivering. "The dear Hauptmann never con-

templated the possibility, and when I write to my beloved Stadtdirectorin——”

“For Heaven’s sake do not drive me out of patience!” cried Frau Meyer.

Frau Schmidt sighed, cast up her eyes, and feeling she might be going too far, said:

“Certainly these young girls are highly inconsiderate.”

“I don’t know about young girls, but *she* is inconsiderate. She was so wretchedly spoilt, I really think it was a mercy her poor father was drowned before he had quite turned her head.”

Frau Schmidt sighed again.

“Well, he always behaved admirably to me,” she said, looking round her reproachfully. “I suppose there is now no hope whatever of his having escaped?”

“Hope!” repeated Frau Meyer angrily. “The idea of such a thing! You are as silly as the girl herself. If people listened to such ridiculous conjectures, I should like to know who could ever feel sure that their relations were dead?”

She was so ruffled that her companion felt it necessary to conciliate. Frau Meyer had the worst possible taste in dress, and an insatiable pleasure in discussing it; there were certain little journals

which Frau Schmidt occasionally received which delighted her; one had fortunately arrived the day before they left Lauterthal, and she now brought it out, and so provided entertainment for the morning.

Wanda went where she liked, nobody hindered her, only there seemed nowhere to go, and the cold was bitter. After dinner she walked down to the miserable houses which were within reach, and enquired whether such a thing as a cart or horse existed. The people stared at her in wonder at the question; an old woman, waking out of a half-torpid state, muttered that once she had been at Mainz; there were houses and boats, and the Rhine! Ah, but that was beautiful! "Here there is nothing," she ended, fingering Wanda's dress curiously. Wanda was so horrified at their poverty, that she poured out the contents of her purse among them, and carried away a heartache.

On her way up the hill she stopped at the thorn-bush and broke the branch which Hans had shown her. She had not quite resolved what to do, but she would speak to him the next morning.

Going into the house, Frau Schmidt met her in the hall.

"Oh, my dear Wanda," she exclaimed, "I wish I had your strength. Was there ever such a dread-

ful place? I would never never have come if I had known. Suppose we should be snowed up?"

"That is very likely to happen," said Wanda.

Frau Schmidt cast up her hands in horror, and the girl herself, though her prediction had been made from mischief, was uneasily conscious that it was anything but improbable. The grey look in the sky betokened snow, and if it came they must be completely shut out from the outer world. What could she do? It seemed as if all her doubts and questionings must then be ended in an utterly hopeless fashion. She tried to read, but the words danced before her eyes. Once, with a resolute determination to be gracious in spite of provocation, she went downstairs, but Frau Meyer cut short all attempts at conversation or music, and Wanda's patience soon failed and carried her back to her room until supper time.

After a dreary and captious evening, bed-time brought some relief. But the wind had risen, and howling round the house with a violence which terrified her, kept her from sleeping. She had never heard anything like the fury of the gusts which raged and tore at the wing of the house of which her room formed the upper angle. It seemed as if invisible hands seized the very walls, and shook them with a fierce determination to lay them

low. The crash of sound, indeed, was indescribable. If for a few minutes it was lulled the silence seemed worse than the tumult, so full was it of expectation and breathless listening for some worse and more dangerous assault. The house was built in a sort of gorge scooped out of the hill, and down this gorge, as through a tunnel, raged the storm with a force to which Wanda was quite unaccustomed. She lay listening fearfully to sounds which seemed to her unexplained by any cause with which she was acquainted; at times she could have sworn there were guns firing, trees being snapped at their roots to fall with a crash; sometimes a pack of wolves might have been howling round the house; to it all imagination added the horrors of a night at sea, of drowning men with their hopeless cries. She dragged the clothes over her head and stopped her ears, but the wailing of the storm reached through such weak defences, and, unnerved and terrified, she lay trembling, yet tried to rest and leave her dear ones in His Hand Who held all the turmoil in check. To a certain extent it lulled at last, and once asleep it would have taken a good deal to awaken her, but when she started up in the morning the wind was still raging round the house, and running to the window to look out, she was sure she must see some dreadful effects of its desolating force. No-

thing that was strange, however, met her eye. Everything was in motion, bending, swaying, or wildly tossed here and there, but no heap of chimneys had crashed into the road, nor even so much as an uprooted tree. The road, swept by the gale, looked harder, whiter, and colder than ever, and when she set forth to meet Hans, she shivered. A strong purpose, however, sustained her. It seemed to her that if her uncle did this thing, shame would be cried upon him from all quarters, but not only on him. It was her father who had bought up the mortgage, and was his dear memory to be shadowed by Jacob's evil doing? She felt as if she must get back to Lauterthal and try to prevent it—how, indeed, she did not know in the least, only the sending her out of the way gave her a conviction that if she were there she might prove an obstacle.

Meanwhile, would Hans really befriend her?

He was standing by the thorn-bush with his back turned when she reached it, and his appearance was certainly not inviting, but Wanda would not stay to think. She said boldly:

“Good day, Hans.”

“Good day, gracious Fräulein.”

“Would you like to earn twenty marks?”

He shook his head.

“No? Why?” asked Wanda in dismay.

"Because gaining them would mean losing my place."

"But something should be done. I would undertake it," said the girl imprudently.

"I would not lose my place for twenty marks, nor yet fifty, *mein gnädiges Fräulein*."

"Heaven help me then!" said Wanda, turning aside with a gesture of despair, "for I must go alone!"

"Through the forest?" said the hunchback with a smile. "Scarcely, my young lady."

It hardly struck her that he had divined her intention. She said thoughtfully:

"Can you find any one to act as guide?"

"There is none better than me."

"Than you?"

"Than me, with permission."

"But you have just said you will not go?"

"Not for twenty marks."

"For what then?"

"For what you have done for me, Fräulein," said the man, turning towards her.

"I!" Then as she remembered the day when she had met him on the hill near the Schloss, she added, "I had forgotten all that."

"Perhaps. But I have not. See here, you were the first person, the first, to say a good word to

me; it had been always, 'rascal, poacher, black-guard!' May be I deserved it, may be I didn't. I hated you with the rest of them, and I came out to tell you what had happened to the Waldemar. Yes, that is true. But before the words were out of my mouth, you told me you were sorry for me. I have never forgotten that. And when you were in trouble yourself, you recollected me, and got your uncle to take me on. Perhaps what they used to call me would fit him even better, but that was not your fault. Now do you understand? If you can walk ten miles, I will guide you to the Waldhaus to-morrow, but it is for what I have said, and not for twenty marks. You had better put some bread in your pockets and a flask of wine."

"Oh, yes!" cried Wanda cheerfully. She stretched out her hand, "Hans, I am so glad; you are a good man. Now we shall get there all right. To-morrow, then, a little later than this."

"A good man!" repeated the hunchback, watching her as she turned and ran up the hill. "No one ever called me that before. I wonder if she could be right!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE day dragged wearily to an end. Frau Jacob found a little resource in housekeeping cares, but it was not enough to turn her thoughts from the grievance of being at Wildberg, the fault of which she steadily laid at Wanda's door. Wanda herself was restless, and watched the weather. In the course of the day, and in spite of cold, she walked as far as the outskirts of the forest. At dinner time she exerted herself more than it must be confessed was often the case, and having extorted a few ungracious remarks from her aunt, without, as usual, showing herself annoyed by them, she said carelessly:

"Tante Anna, when do we go back to Lauterthal?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"There are things I want."

"You should have thought of them before. You cannot expect your uncle to be continually sending parcels backwards and forwards for your convenience. It is your fault that we are here at all!"

"Why?" asked Wanda innocently. But her heart beat.

Frau Jacob remained silent. Frau Schmidt said in a plaintive voice, helping herself to stewed cherries:

"And you must not think, best Wanda, that we do not also make great sacrifices in coming to this terrible place with you."

"With me? I do not understand. Why should I come more than anyone else?" Wanda asked, looking from one to the other. No one answered; and she went on slowly, "What you say seems very strange; at any rate pray tell me if there is any likelihood of our returning this week?"

"Oh, that I trust!" exclaimed Frau Schmidt, clasping her hands with fervour.

"No!" said Frau Meyer defiantly, looking from one to the other. Wanda did not answer, but she became silent and thoughtful. It was after this that she took her long walk, only returning as it grew dusk. All the evening she was unusually gentle, so that Frau Schmidt was astonished and almost grateful.

Wanda went to bed, confident that she would not sleep a wink. Instead of which, and in spite of the wind making as much ado as ever, and rushing at the house as though it would tear it

down, she slept at once, and did not awaken till the morning, when she hastily jumped up, ashamed of her own want of proper feeling.

Yet the night, if it did not bring the reflection she intended, but rest which was likely to be more useful, did not allow the morning to chill her plan, though it was cold enough to perform that operation on most things. She had dreamt of the Von Tellenbachs, and believed they needed her. The frost coated the window so thickly that it was with difficulty she could scratch a hole large enough for an outlook, and then she perceived that a little snow was falling, very little, and very fine, but with a look all round which she did not much care to see, as if it might be coming up.

Being a girl, however, and therefore rash, and quite as ready to court danger as to tremble at it, this did not more than cause her a little shiver, and had no more effect upon her designs. She dressed herself in her warmest clothes, and comforted herself with the thought that there had been this threatening of snow in the air for days, while yet the actual fall kept off.

She was down first, and from the wire basket of rolls took two, which she put in her pocket. Hans' warning about the flask of wine she remembered, but she could not get at wine, and gave up the

idea. She might have poured in a little coffee instead, if Frau Schmidt had not appeared, earlier than usual, her dishevelled hair hid beneath a large cap. According to her own account she had passed an entirely sleepless night, and had come down, hoping for a little soul-refreshing conversation. She implored Wanda not to leave her.

"No one can have any idea of my sufferings in this place," she said in a deprecating manner, "but it is positive torture to an organism like mine. It is a wilderness! I do not believe that living creatures exist. If we stay here much longer, I shall absolutely dread to lose the use of one's tongue."

"There is not much to talk about, certainly," said the young girl seriously. She had just caught sight of the hunchback passing down the road.

"Much! No, indeed, until I came here I never realised how much conversation depends upon external circumstances. However great one's inward resources, it is impossible to feed entirely upon the treasures of the mind."

"Do you mean that provisions are likely to run short?" said Wanda, putting the inquiry with what gravity she could.

"My best Wanda! But you know what I intend by my little figures of speech! And I am glad to have this opportunity of impressing upon you that

you must not consider me unfriendly when I do not openly take your part. I am quite conscious of your aunt's peculiarities; an excellent woman no doubt, but so unsympathetic and abrupt, so unfitted to enter into the complex workings of delicate minds, so———"

"As she is not here, would it not be better to put off discussing her peculiarities?" asked Wanda in a straightforward voice, which came upon Frau Schmidt's florid superabundances like a dash of cold water. She stopped, stared, and began to murmur some apology, in answer to which the girl only nodded, and went out of the room.

"Really, people are most peculiar; there is no knowing how to take any one!" said the lady in a vexed tone. "I should have supposed that if there was anything I could have said to please her, it would have been to find fault with that bear of a woman. What one has to put up with for a livelihood! I never supposed I should have been banished to Siberia! Really it was better in that poor Herr Gottfried's time. But now one's most sacred feelings are treated with levity. And what can one do to amuse oneself!"

All that Frau Schmidt could do was to stand discontentedly at the window, and watch occasional flakes of snow dance up and down in the air. Pre-

sently, however, to her astonishment, she saw Wanda, warmly wrapped up, emerge from the house, and turn down the road.

"What inducement to go out can she find?" she reflected. "Nothing to see, no one to meet, and an air sharp enough to cut off one's nose. Indoors, it is dull enough, but, *lieber Himmel*, a hundred times worse out, and really I cannot conceive what her object can be. I wonder where she can be going?"

By way of finding out as much as lay in her power, she squeezed herself into a corner of the window from which she could command a small stretch of white road. Wanda passed along it. Then, at the risk of freezing, she opened a movable pane fitted into the window, and cautiously projected her head, but this gained her nothing beyond, as turned out, a cold in that member. Presently it struck her that from an upstairs room she might have a larger view, and she was making her way up when she met Frau Meyer, who demanded her services for something or other, and so delayed her. Finally, when she reached her point, nothing was to be seen. No moving figures broke the solitude, and with a sigh that her only distraction should so soon have come to an end, she returned to the close neighbourhood of the stove.

Meanwhile Wanda had found the hunchback

where he had appointed, but his first greeting was to urge her to return.

"There is too much snow about in the air for the walk to be a safe one," he said.

The girl shook her head.

"Tell me this," she said. "When snow comes, what happens?"

"What? It remains," Hans made brief answer.

"For days?"

"For weeks."

"Then the walk would be impossible, while now there is a chance. I am going, Hans."

Wanda's tone was resolute; the other, after a moment's brief reflection, in which he scanned the sky, answered only by turning to walk on.

Looking at his ungainly and misshapen figure, the girl was struck again, as she had been once before, by the speed and lightness with which he walked. Once or twice, finding that he was outstripping her, he paused for her to come up, but he seldom spoke, and she found enough to occupy her in her own thoughts. There was, however, no question about the snow; it thickened round them and gave her some uneasiness. Before they reached the wood the hunchback stopped.

"The gracious Fräulein would do well to go back. I know the look of the clouds, and I see

that much snow may come. The trees may give us a little shelter, but not a great deal, and the walk at the best is hard."

"Oh, no!" Wanda cried earnestly. "I could not bear to go back. I am sure that this small snow need not frighten us. Oh, no, we must go on, indeed!"

They went on accordingly.

Walking, however, had become more difficult. The minute snow particles were by this time filling the air very densely, and in some degree they blinded and confused Wanda. She called to Hans to keep by her side instead of walking a little in front; and this he did. But though he was evidently uneasy, he said no more about returning.

When the forest was at length gained, things were a little better, though Wanda secretly felt not so much so as she had hoped. The snow was indeed of such fineness that it seemed to penetrate everywhere, and the branches therefore did not afford any very great protection. What was more alarming, if she had but known it, was the rising of the wind, which hitherto had not played any large part in the business. She however persuaded herself that among the trees it naturally made more noise; but that if it really were getting up it would keep off the snow. This was a hopeful suggestion,

and as such she took it, yet could not but acknowledge that its comfort lay altogether in the future, for at present the wind added not a little to their difficulties, at any rate to hers, and Hans, seeing this, plunged into the wood, and cut a strong stick for her, sharpened to a spike at one end, and rounded at the top.

It seemed to her that they had been walking for hours, when the hunchback pointed to a peculiarly shaped tree and said briefly:

“Half way.”

“No more!” exclaimed poor Wanda, dismayed. The next moment a sort of desperate satisfaction seized her, that any doubts and fears were thus absolutely quenched, since it was as easy—or as difficult—now to go on as to turn back. But there was no doubt that she had also begun to reflect that she might die before she reached the Waldhaus, or could carry out even the little she had promised herself. If but half were passed, all signs declared that the second half was likely to be ten times harder. The wind had increased in violence, the snow was already lying thick under their feet, though, owing to the wind, it lay unevenly, here and there in deepish drifts, and the air was full of it. Full also of strange and unearthly noises, of angry wailings, and gusts which

brought upon them—or so it seemed to her—awful and bewildering cries. Sometimes—so keen was the blast against her face, so blinding the confusion of the snow—she could scarcely breathe, and this sensation gave her a greater fear than anything else she experienced. Hans looked at her uneasily from time to time. Every now and then she made a sign that she must stop, and grew conscious of a longing to give up and lie down to rest, but had not yet come to the pass of not remembering the danger of it. Even through the thick veil which she had tied over her hat her face was smarting and tingling, for it was impossible to keep out the minute snow which yet cut like knives.

Walking gradually became more difficult and heavy. The snow offered no resistance; they plunged into it, and the next step was another plunge, so that the fatigue was enormous. The hunchback insisted on Wanda's eating something, but he looked grave when he found that her provision consisted of no more than a couple of rolls, and that she had brought no wine. He shook his head as he produced from his pockets some black rye bread, which, however, he did not eat, and a small piece of sausage. After Wanda had taken a little she felt a renewal of strength, and of what was as im-

portant as strength, if not the same thing under another name, energy, so that she pushed on in a manner which surprised Hans. She also tried to talk to him, feeling that by so doing she might keep up a courage disposed to ooze away, perhaps cheat the weariness of the struggle. She asked him whether, when they had reached the Waldhaus, there would be any possibility of getting on to the red-roofed town through which the railway ran. Hans answered gravely that if the snow ceased it might be possible to get a sleigh, but that it was very improbable that the snow would cease that day.

This disheartened her, and they had another interval of silence, indeed the wind rose to a shriek which must have drowned their voices, and there was something in it so indescribably weird and fearful that even Hans once or twice glanced back over his shoulder. Wanda saw the movement and it gave her an added thrill of horror. A dread had for some time been growing up in her mind which she had not dared put into words, but she now felt the silent terror more dreadful than knowledge, and at the first lull in the storm Hans heard her asking breathlessly:

“Are there ever wolves in this part?”

Now traditions of wolves there were, as the

hunchback knew, but he answered her cheerfully, with the hope of at once disposing of this dread.

“*Gnädiges Fräulein*, there would have to be days and days of this weather before the wolves would venture down, supposing there were any at all, which I don’t believe. Wolves! They do for old nurses’ fables.” She did not hear him mutter to himself, “It is the road I think of, and not the wolves,” and she was sufficiently relieved to forget her fears for a little while. Besides, speech was difficult, not to say impossible, and what with the baffling snowflakes, and the bitter driving wind which caught what had settled and drove it round them in whirling clouds, breath and sight were both failing her. She felt as if the end were come. She struggled on a little longer, then, not able to speak, caught the hunchback’s sleeve, and signed to him that she could do no more.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE hunchback saw in a moment that things were serious. He placed the girl with her back to a tree, shook himself, sending the powdered snow flying in a cloud, and then made a penthouse of his hands, and tried to look before or behind. But for seeing anything more than the nearest trees, ghost-like, through the whiteness of whirling snow, it was beyond any man's eyes. He then turned to Wanda, and perceiving that she was showing such signs of exhaustion that it was likely she would drop down where she stood, he seized her arm and shook her with kindly violence.

"Push on a little farther, for the love of Heaven, my Fräulein!" he cried. "You must not stop here."

Wanda by a great effort struggled forwards a few more yards. Then she said despairingly:

"I can't. All my strength has left me," and, with his head down he just caught the rest of her words, "Go, go, and save yourself."

He made a gesture of impatience.

"I am not going to leave you. But listen. There is a goatherd's hut which cannot be very far away, and which you must try to reach. I am very strong, and if you cannot walk I shall carry you, but meanwhile do as much as you can."

He spoke bravely, yet with a sinking heart, for old Wilhelm's hut was still some distance by the road, and to reach it with Wanda in this condition he knew that he must risk a short cut across the forest. And although he had been so familiar with it in his youth that he would have boasted he could find his way blindfold—this tempest, this bewilderment of landmarks, was more baffling than blindness.

Having spoken to her she did not seem to understand, and he repeated his words yet more urgently.

Then a strange thing happened.

She had sunk down at the foot of the tree, when she suddenly lifted her head as if she were listening, and cried out rapturously, "Father!"

"Come," said Hans once more.

As he spoke he lifted her up and put his arm round her as a support. Wanda murmured some words he could not distinguish. They were, "God *will* help."

His task was one of extreme danger. The girl's

powers were now so feeble that only his arm prevented her from sinking. So blinding was the snow that it seemed impossible they could keep in the right direction, and now and then they fell upon a drift from which they had much ado to crawl out, and now and then struck a tree, unseen in the confusion of all things about them. Wanda, too, again and again most piteously urged him to let her rest. What would be the end of it all he did not dare stop to think, being occupied enough with every step he took, and the doubt of another following, also with the great uncertainty of whether they were really bearing in the direction of the hut; while the cries of the wind and its uproar among the branches were so loud that sometimes he could have vowed he heard distant shouts, and sometimes, against reason, imagination brought the howl of wolves about them.

Then came another stage and a worse. Wanda, roused, had battled on with longer endurance than seemed possible, but now neither her own efforts nor Hans' arm could avail farther, and utterly exhausted, she sank down in the snow, a helpless heap. He dragged her up and she sank again; he beat the snow from her almost roughly, and shouted to her to struggle a little longer; but if she were not utterly exhausted she neither heard nor

noticed, and it was evident that the deadly torpor of cold and exhaustion was creeping over her. The hunchback, whose strength was great, lifted her in his arms, and struggled on with her. But after a time the forces against which he had to fight proved too tremendous; he staggered, and with a groan laid Wanda on the ground, then staring before him with the despair of one who has no longer hope of escape, made a sudden step forward. He had recognised a tree of peculiar formation, known to all the country round as Old Peter, and seeing this he knew that he was not eighty feet from the goat-herd's hut. It gave him a thrill of relief; he stumbled back to Wanda's side, and once more raising her in his long thin arms, staggered forward towards the spot where he knew the hut should be. Even now, however, so terrible was the tumult of wind and snow, so tremendous the labour of holding his burden in their teeth, that more than once he was forced to pause, and—thinking so short a length must already have been passed—felt a dreadful fear lest his senses should have deceived him, and the well-known tree had not been where he beheld it.

At last his straining eyes caught sight of the hut, a poor place, whitened with snow, which the drift had piled high against the walls; but never

palace could have been welcomer. Empty he knew it must be, for Wilhelm only lived there in the summer; but yet here was shelter, and the chance of something with which to make a fire. There would be nothing to tempt thieves, or bolt on the door, but the fear of its opening outwardly troubled him, for the snow lay so deep that this would entail time and work. He gave a vigorous kick to prove the matter, upon which the door flew open and a heap of snow fell in. He carried Wanda in, laid her on a rude bench, closed the door with labour, and looked round to see what possibility there was of getting a fire.

The rafters were rough, and dark as it had become, he could see loose pieces hanging here and there, and dragged down enough to make a tolerable pile under the low chimney. In his pocket with his pipe was a box of matches, and it was not long before a blaze began to leap up. He took off his jacket, placed it in front of the fire, laying Wanda on it, and rubbing her hands and feet with a perseverance which in time had its effect. She stirred, moaned, finally opened her eyes, and stared at him in wonder.

"Where am I?" she said feebly. "Is this the Waldhaus?"

"We could not get there, the snow was so bad.

This is a poor hut, but here you are safe, and the first thing to do, gracious Fräulein, is to eat a little."

He made her do this, and the colour came back to her cheek, but the sight of her small store gave him a good deal of disquietude, and determined him to make the attempt to reach the Waldhaus himself that night, and to bring back what she required. For the moment, however, he said nothing.

As for Wanda she felt neither hunger nor thirst, nothing but the absolute exhaustion in which everything passes as in a dream. Through a mist she saw the rude bare hut, the minute snow-flakes whirling about the little window, the dark corners, the misshapen figure of the man who was her only protector, stooping towards the leaping blaze. All was dim and unreal. Unreal also, and far away, sounded the wild voices of the forest, the roar of the wind, the cracking of the branches. They were like pictures and sounds of which she was aware, but with which she had nothing to do: for the present they were unaccompanied by either fear or horror, and made scarcely any impression on her brain.

Hans, on the contrary, had his senses well about him, and each one brought its own uneasiness. With a better supply of food he would have re-

mained quiet, but he had taken as little as was possible for himself, and was excessively hungry, and the snow showed no sign of abating. He did not believe that by the next morning Wanda could get on to the Waldhaus, and if his own strength were starved out of him they would be in a terrible plight. It was better that he should go at once, and send back help, although he felt sure she would oppose his going. But first he must provide fuel for the fire.

He carefully searched the hut, rafters, floor, and walls, and after a time found a hole into which he thrust his arm and drew out a battered saucepan, a horn cup, a couple of spoons, and an old axe. Among these possessions the axe was the treasure, for though he looked hungrily at the saucepan, there was nothing to do with it, except perhaps melt a little snow. But with the axe he might in half an hour's time cut down some branches from the smaller trees round the hut, and thus leave fuel enough and to spare. He was going to tell Wanda what he had resolved upon when he saw that she was asleep, and so soundly, that neither his opening the door, nor the rush of wind and snow which whirled in, awoke her.

With difficulty he closed the door, and set himself to his blinding work. Thus Wanda was left

alone in the hut, where the light had so faded that only the wavering flames of the wood here and there lit up the gloom, and fell on the young girl's pale face. She was lying before the fire, her head resting on her fur cap; some of her beautiful hair had been blown from its fastenings, and caught golden gleams in the firelight; her face, white with exhaustion, yet looked as peaceful as a child's, and her whole attitude was indescribably easy. Had a painter been there he would have found his picture in the contrasts—the bare hut with its deep smoky shadows, the young girl stretched before the fire, and Hans the hunchback coming in with his armful of sticks and branches.

He piled enough of them on and by the fire to last the night, stood for a moment thinking, and then wakened Wanda to tell her that he was going. Her first impression was one of horror.

“If you leave me here alone, Hans, I shall die!” she said, looking round with a shudder. “For Heaven's sake wait till the morning and take me with you!”

“Listen, gracious lady,” said the hunchback earnestly. “No one knows whether the snow will not be twice as bad by to-morrow. The Waldhaus

is not more than two miles off by a cut I know, even shorter than the road which passes quite close here. So I can reach it before night, and come back to you, as I swear I will, with food, and others to help. It will save time, too, if you have to get on to Lauterthal."

She shivered and hid her face.

"Here—all alone!"

"You are safe, believe me. No one can harm you. Let down the wooden bolt, and keep a good fire. In two or three hours I shall be back." Then, as if moved by some misgiving he added, "Will you give me the crimson handkerchief from your neck?"

He fastened it securely to a stick, went outside, and managed to thrust it into a window bar, so that it hung on the side nearest the road, and might serve as a signal to attract attention. Wanda said no more; she watched him with listless sadness, her hands crossed on her lap. But as he broke off a piece of his own black bread, and laid the rest down for her on the bench, she rose up hastily, and pushed it back into his hands.

"Do you want to kill me?" she said, "when it is I who have brought you into this danger?"

Nor would she rest until he had taken it. She

did not see that as he went out he slipped it again upon the window ledge, but as he passed through the door, she cried "God keep you, Hans!" and they were the last words that fell upon his ear before he began his struggle with the snow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEFT alone, all the fears which exhaustion had lulled sprang up, and set themselves to work upon Wanda's nerves. She ran to the door and let down the wooden bolt. Next she ran to the fire and piled wood upon it with a reckless hand. Then she sat down on the bench and thrust her fingers into her ears, to try to keep out some of the many noises which appalled her.

The solitude of the place was, indeed, likely to grow fearfully prominent, and the idea that in two or three hours time Hans might return with help, had no effect in bringing comfort, because the two or three hours became in imagination a space quite beyond her powers of holding out, and at first she could not take hold of them with reason. It was not until he had been gone half an hour, and she had found it out by looking at her watch, that she began to realise that time was actually passing, and to draw out of this some courage.

She was hungry and thirsty, and it gave her occupation to melt the snow with which Hans had

stuffed the saucepan, and to eat—very slowly—a little bread, for he had warned her to husband her resources. Then, as soon as an hour had gone by, she began to listen intently, and to hope for his return, although, directly she began to think about it, she knew that as yet it was impossible.

However, this helped her, and helped her, moreover, to feel sleepy, and in spite of everything, to doze where she sat in a corner close to the fire, leaning against the wall. Hans had left matches, and the fire, even if it burnt down, was likely to live long on its embers, so that this fear did not trouble her, and as she became more mistress of herself, she knew that she must not be so lavish in her supply of fuel.

Sometimes she would get up and pace backwards and forwards, and once as the horrible sense of loneliness seemed to be sweeping over her again, she began unsteadily to sing an old German chorale. At first her own voice terrified her, but she went on, till with the words there came the sense of the Abiding Presence, and a strange new feeling of calm waiting soothed her terror. After this, more than once, through the night, she either sang or repeated the words aloud.

For the night went on, and Hans did not return. Wanda tried to feel that it was possible they had

persuaded him to wait for morning, and exhaustion and want of food seemed to dull her powers of thinking. At last, indeed, she slept a good deal, starting up now and then to put more wood on the fire, but for the most part mercifully unconscious of loneliness or danger; so that when the grey dawn began to break, and through the little window she saw the still falling snow-flakes, she could hardly conceive that the long night had come to an end. But now, surely, help must soon be there!

She went to the window and found the hunchback's black bread. What remained of her own she was keeping out of sight, for hunger was beginning to make itself sharply felt, and on coming suddenly and unexpectedly on this little store, it mastered her, and she ate it ravenously. It was little enough, but revived her, and she then reproached herself with not having been more prudent. However, Hans would certainly be there before long.

After this she again sat down by the fire to wait.

There is a popular impression that solitude combined with forced idleness should be admirably conducive to thought. Illness, for instance, having enough of both, is often treated by persons who have never experienced it, as a time so suitable

for reflection that large results of increased wisdom are looked for from its leisure. Alas, it is rather the feeling than the thinking part of us which is apt to prove its force at such a season; the fretfulness of weakness, the fear of pain! Wanda, as she sat in the lonely goatherd's hut in the heart of the forest, with nothing to occupy her, or anything except the incessant noise of the wind to break the solitude, had, to all appearances, a favourable opportunity for thought, with small hope of interruption. Only she was hungry. She could not think much about the Schloss or the mortgage, or what she should say to her uncle. The picture which most desirably presented itself to her mind was that of Hans Kaufmann returning from the Waldhaus with help and with food.

She was also thirsty, the black liquid which was produced in small quantities by melting snow in old Wilhelm's saucepan, proving neither pleasant nor satisfying. Still it was sufficient to prevent actual suffering. But the hunger was more serious, and after a time she began to be ashamed of the persistency with which her thoughts fastened themselves upon this one fact. She tried rather to turn them to dwell upon the mercy which had kept them from death on the previous day, kneeling down and thanking her Father. And she was conscious, more-

over, of a deeper sense of His love and care than she had, perhaps, ever before experienced in her life. Nevertheless, to her shame and dismay, she found her mind travelling back to its absorbing question of when Hans would come with the food.

For a time the feeling of loneliness was under better control, and she kept it at bay with all the force she could exert; by-and-by, however, as the long hours crawled by, and the faintness of hunger weakened her nerves, it began again to master her. What could have happened to the hunchback? Had he never reached the Waldhaus? Was he now lying cold and stark and snow-covered in this terrible forest where she had brought him, and would his death lie at her door? Her fancies about the wolves came back, and she pictured them hunting him down, and creeping back to surround the hut, and make her doubly a prisoner. With the terror strong upon her she ran to the little window, glazed with coarse green glass and scarcely a foot square, contrived to undo the rusty fastening, and stretched her head through the opening. Always the same sight, always the thickly falling snow—though she fancied the fall had slightly lessened—the bending branches, the ghastly whiteness of the sky. The crimson handkerchief was there, as Hans had left it. With a feeling of desperation she caught, shook

it, tried to cry aloud for help, and got no answer but the roar of the wind among the trees.

She closed the window and turned away. Hunger, sharp and keen, came back, and she ate her last morsel, and then would have given worlds not to have done so, for the feeling of being absolutely without food seemed worse than the keenest hunger. Beginning to fear that wood too would fail her, she stripped what she could from the low rafters, and the work seemed to while away the time, though she had little strength for it. When it was over she fell to listening feverishly, standing just inside the closed door, till forced back by the cold. She longed for sounds differing from those wearisome sounds of the storm, yet if anything struck her ear for which she could not immediately account, trembled all over. At other times she walked, quickly but feebly, backwards and forwards over the mud floor, as if by this means to quiet her excitement.

Her strength failed before long, and she staggered back at last to the bench by the fire, and dropped upon it. There she remained, while as a sort of contradiction to the apathy of her body, all sorts of visions passed swiftly through her brain. But most of them were connected in some manner with food and the spread of rich banquets. The

fire died down, for she had no strength, or even desire, to heap on wood; the subtle cold began to penetrate into the hut, and mercifully to dull her senses to the sharpness of hunger. The hours crept slowly by; once or twice she roused herself to look up, to wonder how many days had passed since Hans left her alone in the hut, and with dry parched lips to say a few words of prayer, but torpor was creeping over her, and by-and-by, all sight, and sound, and feeling had faded away with the slow ebbing of life.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE gracious Herr will find it best to keep to the left."

A sleigh, drawn by two horses, was making its way with some difficulty along the forest road. A gentleman was driving, another man sat by his side, and a great wolf-hound bounded joyously along, flinging the snow from right to left, or leaping now and then at the nose of the off horse. The Herr, whoever he was, said presently with a laugh:

"It's very well that the snow has ceased and that it is freezing so hard, otherwise this road of yours might end by swallowing us up. What a place it is!"

"With permission, not so bad," said the other, "only the Herr chooses a strange time for going through it. A strange time, too, for the family to be at Wildberg, for that is a wild place. I have known it snowed up for weeks."

"A strange time, as you say."

"If the gentleman had come there for sport it would be another thing. But Melchior, who saw

them pass, said there were only ladies, and indeed the groom who brought the mare said the same thing. Excuse me, gracious Herr, there is a dangerous stump sticking out of the snow."

"You know the way pretty well, I see; how far have we come?"

"About two miles. In a few minutes we ought to pass the only hut on this side. Yes, there it is."

"I see no hut."

"The Herr must look farther among the trees. Not that it does to look anywhere in this weather," he added, as the near horse plunged into a drift. It took all the driver's care and skill to extricate themselves, and he thought no more of the hut. But as they were driving on he glanced back at it.

"No one lives there, I suppose?"

"*Mein Herr*, no. Not in the winter."

"I could have sworn I saw a little smoke coming from the chimney."

The other shook his head without looking.

"Most likely the snow powder. Though, to be sure, some one may have lit a fire there to warm himself."

But by this time the gentleman had pulled up the horses.

"Look for yourself," he said, with some impatience. "It appears to me that some sort of red

signal is fluttering from the window. And what is Oscar doing?"

For the dog, having gone off on a voyage of discovery round the hut, was now violently scratching away the snow from the door, and uttering a series of short, deep barks, as if calling for assistance.

"Take the reins," exclaimed his master, flinging them to the other man as he spoke; "there is something that wants looking after, or Oscar would not ask me to come."

He jumped out and plunged into the snow. The dog seeing this, changed his bark for an eager whine, and set to work with greater vigour to scrape back the drift against the door with his powerful paws. Rudolf, however, for it need not be explained that it was Rudolf, made his way to the window, and sweeping away the snow, and shouting, was pretty well convinced from the absence of sound or sight through the glass of anything moving, that the hut was empty. He tried the door—it was fastened.

"Oscar, you old fool," he said, putting his hand kindly on the dog's head, "what are you making this to-do about? There is no one here."

The dog, with his splendid head on one side, looked at him, and then suddenly and vehemently

resumed his scratching. Rudolf walked round the hut, and could find no footsteps. The red handkerchief, still and frozen, showed that some one had been there; but through the green glass of the window the place looked dim and empty, and he imagined that those who had found shelter had departed. He called the dog, a little angry, it must be owned, at the delay, and turned away. Oscar did not obey the call. In a minute or two Rudolf repeated it sharply. The dog ran a few paces towards him, but immediately turned back, seated himself at the door of the hut and uttered a long dreary howl. Rudolf was just getting into the sleigh, when this arrested him. The man he had left in the sleigh, who was impatiently thumping his chest to get a little warmth into his numbed hands, said:

“Ah, the Herr found nothing, I’ll wager?”

“Nothing,” said Rudolf briefly. But as Oscar’s appeal rose into the air, he exclaimed, “The dog must have a reason, and I will find it out. Move the horses about a little, Schneider, to keep them from the cold;” and once more he turned towards the hut.

This time he wasted no time in outside investigations. The bolt was not very strong, and two or three vigorous kicks sent it flying. Man, dog,

and snow tumbled into the hut together, and the next moment Oscar had sprung to the side of a girl who was lying insensible upon a low bench, and was doing his best to revive her by licking face and hands. The dog by superior sense had long ago found out who was there; but Rudolf, without his advantages, had to wait for his eyes to tell him, and then surprise for a moment deprived him of the power of doing anything.

Wanda was lying with her head upon her arm, which she had used to pillow it a little from the hard wood, her white face turned upwards, and her beautiful hair lying round it in confusion. Her lips had fallen a little apart, there was no sign of colour in her cheeks. The first sensation which succeeded amazement in Rudolf's mind was the sharp horror that he had been brought here to find her dead; he dropped on his knees by her side, and cried out passionately:

“Wanda!”

Oscar, as he heard the cry, lifted his head and looked at his master, then set to work again to lick her hand, as much as to say that deeds not words were wanted, and Rudolf, brought to himself, sprang to his feet, flung what wood remained on the fire, and raising her so that her head rested against his

shoulder, took a flask from his pocket, and poured a few drops into her mouth.

"She is frozen and starved," he said, glancing round the desolate hut, and seeing no sign of food. "How she was brought here God only knows, for it is the most wonderful thing in the world. But what am I to do if she does not come round?"

And, indeed, she showed no signs of life, and Rudolf began to be conscious that the man left in the sleigh was shouting to know what had become of him, and what had happened. After a few minutes' thought he laid her gently again upon the bench, told Oscar to watch, and ran out. Schneider's amazement at hearing that the Fräulein of whom they were going in search was in the goatherd's hut was extreme. He wanted to jump out and run to see for himself, but this Rudolf would not permit, and all the while that he was rapidly explaining what was to be done, he was dragging a wolf-skin from the sleigh.

"I have a hunch of bread and meat here," said Schneider, producing them, to the other's joy. Then he got his orders, which were to drive back to the Waldhaus, and return with help, and more food, and more warm things and the Hausmutter herself or anyone he thought better able to minister to Wanda.

“And take care of Miranda,” Rudolf cried out as the jingling bells began to sound, and the sleigh once more set off.

He hurried back to the hut, where Oscar who was uneasy, gave him warm welcome. Wanda had not moved: he spread the wolf-skin before the fire, laid her tenderly upon it, and kneeling down by her side, dropped brandy between her lips. How long he knelt there he never knew. Thoughts of all kinds—tender, triumphant, sad—crowded upon him; resolves melted away, came sternly back, vanished again before the sweet pale face of the young girl with its signs of suffering. And once—once—when the resolves were uppermost, he stooped down and softly kissed her upon the cheek.

So the minutes went by. The wind had died away and the forest was still. Oscar had lain down at last near the door, with his ears showing that he was on the watch for sounds, Rudolf’s heart sinking as he felt the uselessness of his efforts, when he caught a faint sigh; Wanda stirred, opened her eyes, and closed them again. All his hopes came back with a bound; he moistened a little bread with the brandy, got it between her lips, and presently saw that she swallowed it. Then she moaned, moved her arm restlessly,

opened her eyes again, and fixed them upon him. He gave her another teaspoonful of the food. She still looked at him. He bent forward gently:

“Wanda, do you know me?”

Her lips moved; he stooped lower to catch the fluttering words.

“*Auf Wiedersehn!*” she said softly, and closed her eyes again; but there was such rest, such exquisite happiness in the words that Rudolf’s last resolve vanished for ever.

In a few minutes sense began to clear, and she raised herself on her elbow and looked round her in wonder and with the usual questions:

“But where am I? What has happened?”

“That I can never tell you, *mein Fräulein*,” said the young man, “for I know nothing of what can have brought you. It was the strangest thing that I should find you here, when I was on my way to Wildberg; but as to how it happened!——”

She did not seem to have fully heard him, for wonder was creeping over her face more than yet had been there.

“Is it really Baron Rudolf?” she asked.

“You knew me just now,” said he, a little hurt at the sweetness of that knowledge being lost.

“I thought it was a dream,” Wanda answered simply. “I do not now understand.”

"You are not sorry to find you are awake?" he asked, with eagerness.

She turned her head again and looked at him. A smile broke over her face; but at the same moment she became very white, and would have fallen back if he had not caught her.

"I am a fool," he said to himself angrily, "to let her speak before she has had more food."

He fed her again, as he had done before, and she let him do it, and by-and-by a little colour crept into her cheeks, and she moved from his arm which was round her, and noticed Oscar, but was still content to lie and ask no questions, nor could he ask her any, although he was dying to know what extraordinary chance had brought her alone to this solitary place. It was evident she had suffered a great deal, but the how or why remained a mystery. She said at last, softly:

"Hans is safe?"

"Hans?"

"Hans, the hunchback. He came with me, and went on to the Waldhaus for help. Did he tell you?"

"Hans has not been at the Waldhaus," said Rudolf, wondering.

This roused her, and painfully. She sat up and begged that he would start at once to look for

him, only take her with him, evidently horrified at the idea of remaining alone. But when he had assured her it was an impossibility, she looked round with a shudder and said she would stay there and wait, if he would go.

"I cannot do that, *mein Fräulein*," said Rudolf, gravely. "But see here, any moment now I expect to hear the bells of the sleigh, and then there will be plenty to go to look for Hans. Not that he should ever have brought you here," he added sternly, thinking of what he knew of the man, and sorely perplexed.

"He did not," said Wanda, eagerly; "it was I who brought him. Listen;" and she went on to tell him that she had been set upon getting back to Lauterthal, that Miranda had been left at the Waldhaus. "Have you seen her?" she interrupted.

"She brought me here," he explained, smiling. "She heard my voice and whinnied. Oscar and I soon found her out, and as I wanted to reach Wildberg in good time, I ventured to have her put in the sleigh. But it is Oscar to whom I owe *this*."

The dog, hearing his name, came and laid his great head upon his master's knee, and looked lovingly at him.

"Yes," he continued, "Oscar would not let me go on, as I should have done. He was a hundred

times wiser than I. Now tell me more of how you came here."

"Hans was my only friend," said the girl, speaking with evident pain, "and he consented to guide me through the forest."

"On foot?"

"How else could I come? He warned me many times about the snow, but I would not listen to him, for I wanted so much to get away from Wildberg, and I insisted upon coming on. We lost our way; it was dreadful, but not so dreadful as being here alone," she added, looking round and again shuddering.

"Since when?"

"Since last evening. The hunger—that was the worst. But, oh, poor Hans!"

"We will send to look for him directly they arrive, and in that blinding snow storm it is quite possible that he may have wandered in an opposite direction. But I cannot bear to think of what you have suffered."

"It is over now," Wanda said simply.

"Will you not tell me why you so much wanted to get back to Lauterthal?" said Rudolf, looking at her.

She shook her head and coloured faintly.

"No, that I cannot explain to you. It was ne-

cessary that I should speak to my uncle." For the first time his being there seemed to strike her as extraordinary, for she pushed the hair back from her forehead, sat more upright and said quickly, "But I do not understand. You were in England, Herr Baron, and I wrote a letter."

Her voice faltered, and the colour faded away, as Rudolf bent forward, took her hand in his, and said eagerly:

"How can I thank you enough for doing it! It brought me back."

"It brought you back? And—have you seen my uncle? Is it, perhaps, not as the Baroness feared?"

He appeared to hesitate, but surely there was a smile on his lips as he answered:

"It was true—it is not now."

"Ah, thank the dear Lord!" Wanda exclaimed, joyfully clasping her hands. "How happy your words make me. See here, Herr Baron, I am not any longer afraid; I believe that Hans will be kept from death, and I from the horror of having caused it."

Perhaps, in spite of his assurances he was more alive to the danger of Hans' position than she was, or perhaps his faith was weaker, for something in his expression struck her, and she turned yet paler.

"You are thinking of my father, and that some-

times He does not see fit to save," she said, after a pause.

He started up.

"You put me to shame," he said, in an unsteady voice, "for those very last words of yours carry with them a weight you do not yet understand. *Mein Fräulein*, are you strong enough to bear news?"

"I do not think there are many ways left in which sorrow can come to me, because I am so very desolate," Wanda said, with a simplicity which cut him to the heart. "At any rate I do not think bad news can much affect me."

"I did not say it was bad news," said Rudolf slowly.

She looked suddenly at him. He was smiling at her.

"I was on my way to you. I shall make you very happy."

He stopped. Wanda had risen, and was leaning towards him, her hands stretched out, her face transfigured.

"My father!"

"Yes—alive—well. That was the news I was bringing."

She tottered, and he caught her in his arms: but the next moment she had recovered, released herself, and fell down on her knees on the floor.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, "forgive me. How can I thank Thee?"

There was such rapture in her face, in her voice, that, involuntarily, Rudolf also sank down by her side, and remained there. She had covered her face, and did not even see him; he would have liked to have drawn her head on his shoulder, and there let her pour forth her thankfulness; but he did not dare so much as speak to her, or interrupt the sweet and healing course of joy. Yet it seemed to him a long time before she looked at him—her eyes wet with happy tears—and stretched out her hand.

"And you were coming to tell me this—this! How can I ever thank you!"

"Well," he said smiling, "we had better not enter on that subject, or I might ask inconvenient questions as to what brought you here."

She did not seem to notice, her thoughts having fastened on her father and beginning to trouble themselves.

"Is he well?" she asked quickly.

"Not quite, or he would be here himself. But there is nothing the matter that rest and care will not set right."

"Tell me how it was."

"Your father and some other men got into a

boat and kept afloat in her for four or five days, when they were picked up by a vessel bound for the Azores. They suffered great hardships in that time, I am afraid," he hesitated, turning away from her pleading eyes, "for two or three men died, and for weeks your father lay unconscious with brain fever. They put him ashore in this state at a hospital on the islands; nobody knew so much as his name, and perhaps they did not take much trouble to find out."

"But when he recovered?"

"His recovery was very slow. For a long time his life was despaired of, and afterwards, and when the actual fever had left him, it was only by little and little, and after many drawbacks, that reason returned. Memory was yet slower; he has told me that for a long time he was merely conscious of that strange effort with which we sometimes try to recall a dream, knowing there was something somewhere——"

"He told you! You have seen him!"

"*Mein Fräulein*, he was in the very train into which I got at Brussels. We came on together."

"But why—why did he not write?"

"He did," Rudolf said briefly.

"How? I do not understand. Pray forgive me—I had no letter!"

"He both telegraphed and wrote. But—lest

the shock to you should be too great, your letter was enclosed in one to his brother."

"And it was lost!" cried Wanda clasping her hands.

Rudolf was silent. He would not at that moment dim her perfect contentment, or tell her that the letter had safely reached its destination; that Jacob, dreading his brother's return and the discovery which must follow of certain fraudulent actions of his own, had resolved to gain a little time by withholding it, had sent Wanda out of the way, and his wife with her, believing that the latter would only hamper his flight, and that she could easily join him at some future day. By the arrangements he had made, he had no difficulty in realising a considerable sum of money, and with this had absconded, making some pretext for his departure, and trusting to his brother's care for the Meyer name, and the importance of keeping it unstained before the world, to prevent too close pursuit and prosecution.

It is probable that Wanda was not without doubts. She looked once or twice at Rudolf as if she would have questioned, but each time checked herself and remained silent. Silence, indeed, seemed too full to be broken, and the gladness of hearts which have found a new happiness needs, at first, little outward expression. It was a dreary and

desolate place, lighted chiefly by the cold gleam of the snow; but hopes can blossom and joy break forth in the most unlikely places. And the sight of Wanda, and the belief that it was for them she had run this danger, had broken down some relations of Rudolf's which might have imperilled the happiness of two people. Oscar went back to the door to watch, Wanda sat and looked at the fire, almost fearing that her joy must be a dream, and Rudolf, afraid of startling her, or of seeming to take advantage of her loneliness, contented himself with surrounding her with a hundred tender cares, to which the poor child had so long been a stranger that they seemed the sweeter. He wrapped her in the skin, made her take more food, and altogether, to both of them, the time was so full of deep contentment, that the sound of bells and of voices, and Oscar's deep bark of response, came sooner than they could have wished, until Wanda, remembering Hans, started up, begging Rudolf to find out if anything had been heard of him. He went to the door, but came back as if he could not leave her, and stretched out his arms.

"Wanda!" he said.

She laid her head on his shoulder, he clasped her close, and in that minute their hearts told each other all.

CHAPTER XX.

QUITE a little procession had arrived to escort Wanda back to the Waldhaus; the landlord and two or three foresters, besides the usual hangers on, and Schneider, who was afraid that his delay would be thought beyond all reason, and was relieved to find that Baron Rudolf imagined him to have come in an extraordinarily short time. They had been hindered, just as they were starting, by some one coming in and reporting that a forester who lived a mile or two off had that morning found a man who had lost himself in the forest the night before, and was pretty well at the last stage of exhaustion from cold and hunger. This drew sympathies in another direction, and required looking into, particularly when the landlord found out by inquiries and description, that it was no other than his old acquaintance, Hans the hunchback. It seemed as if this were all that was wanting to put the last touch to Wanda's happiness. She came out, looking pale, but so radiant and sparkling that the men stared at her as if she had been an ap-

parition. Schneider said under his breath, "So! if this is what arrives from being half-perished in the forest, one need not think much about it;" and the old landlord was so amazed that he stood gaping with his hat in his hand. Oscar was jumping round Miranda who came in for her share of greeting.

"I don't like to see her in the sleigh," Wanda said, smiling, and turning to Rudolf. "She has not been accustomed to it, and I am sure it does not please her. Don't you think she might be taken out, and that I might ride her?"

The landlord interposed to say there was no saddle; but as Rudolf jumped at the proposal, a skin or two were strapped on her back, and Wanda set on them, without requiring any of the restoratives which had been intended to bring her to life. So the procession started again, the landlord and Schneider in the sleigh, the other men walking; last of all Rudolf and Wanda. If they had been silent in the hut, here they had so much to say, so many explanations to make, that one would have supposed the little journey had been made on purpose for them. Thanks to being thrown so entirely on the young Baron, Wanda showed him more of herself—her hopes and fears—than he might otherwise have found out in a month. And as for him, the home sickness that had been at work during

those weary months in London, his disappointments and failures, had done what no doubt they were intended to do. Then Wanda's forlornness touched him profoundly. When he had seen her before—at any rate until their last meeting—he had imagined that she despised their poverty, exalted the Meyer riches, and was over well satisfied with herself, her life, and her prospects. In the hut things were different. There he found himself in another position, one sweeter to the man, and there her words about her loneliness went straight to his heart. He had come back to Lauterthal with dreams of her, with visions of one day winning her; when perhaps some fame, at any rate some money, had grown out of his new ventures; but all this waiting had come suddenly to an end, and blossomed into present certainty and joy.

As for Wanda, while shades of the same feelings had touched her also, and she fancied herself despised by Rudolf, and had a horrible conviction that he supposed her ready to sell herself for rank, she had liked him when she least admitted it. In her heart of hearts, together with a secret rage at her own weakness, there had always been an interest, an inclination, call it what you will. It is the history of many a woman's heart, and does not often end so happily.

Something of each other's feelings they learnt in that ride, and great interest their discoveries caused them. One thing puzzled Rudolf not a little, and this was when Wanda, with the most charming blush in the world, acknowledged that at the time her father went to the Schloss, carrying her rejection of the young Baron, she, at home, cried bitterly, and wished the difference of position did not exist. It startled him to know that she was aware any negotiations had been on foot, and yet more to find that it was he who had been refused. But for this, at any rate, he was thankful.

Wanda, in her turn, learnt something of him; of the hopes and dreams he had taken to London; how gradually these had died away, and how at last, resolved not to return to be an added burden at home, he had found employment as a teacher, and learnt that ambition does not carry one up the ladder at a bound.

"The Baron and Baroness thought it was something quite different; what do they say?" cried Wanda, amazed.

"They don't know, they must never know! I believe it would break my father's heart," said the young man quickly.

"That you should do such an honourable and

manly thing? Oh, Herr Baron, I am sure that is what my father would call it."

Nor could she quite approve of his reasons, although his request was sufficient to bind her to secrecy. She said sadly:

"In your class I suppose you cannot face adversity. The Baron and Baroness have never allowed Madame de Beaumont to know what they have gone through. I think it would be happier, oh, much happier, to share everything; but then—I am not of your class."

"We at least will share everything," said Rudolf, looking at her, so that she looked away, and forgot all else in the delicious trouble of the moment, except that her hand was kissed and kept in his.

Such episodes had the usual effect of prolonging what there was to say, and he had a great deal to say when he arrived at the subject of her letter. So brave and kind a letter, it seemed, had never been written. He had heard so little from his father, that its contents came upon him like a thunderbolt, and brought him at once. Here he told her something about Dick, and was relieved by the gladness which she showed in listening. And then came the amazement of Herr Meyer's appearance, and his own astonishment at hearing how Rudolf had been occupied. Home-sick and disappointed,

and home-sick and anxious, the two men drew together. Rudolf could give Herr Meyer news for which he was hungering, and Herr Meyer was half vexed, half pleased to find the young man where he was. Then he eagerly read Wanda's letter.

"*So!* It looks as if it were time for me to be at home again," he said, frowning. "My girl must have been sore put to it before she wrote that to you, Herr Rudolf. But is the child so much at the Schloss?"

"My mother writes that she is constantly with them."

Gottfried Meyer flushed with pleasure and stretched out his hand.

"That's good of your mother. Poor *Liebchen!* I would lay a wager she has been sorrowful enough for thinking of me as dead and gone, and not much caring about her aunt. And so she has been at the Schloss? I shan't forget it."

This is what really passed, though Rudolf did not relate it all. It had been a bitter disappointment to her father to find that she was at Wildberg, and then came the shock of his brother's disappearance, which, added to his own recent illness, made it impossible for him to follow her, and Rudolf had eagerly offered himself as messenger and been accepted.

Wanda never forgot that strange and dreamy ride through the wood; weariness and happiness, physical weakness and sweet delight, all mingling. The men were marching in front of them, a picturesque troop, plodding through the snow; the oldest man was flourishing his pipe, and haranguing his nearest neighbours loudly upon adventures of his when younger. Some of his hearers, having been hearers many a time before, had slipped out of the way, one or two walked stolidly on, uttering now and then a harsh guttural; a boy, fresh to the thrilling tales, listened open-mouthed, and wished more had happened on this day, that he might have had a part. Overhead was shining a clear and frosty sky, towards which snow-laden branches stretched themselves. Wanda's eyes were dim, as she, too, lifted her eyes towards the clear brightness. Father restored to her, lover given; what song of thankfulness was not due from her heart to the Great Giver?

But when at last they reached the Waldhaus, weariness had become intense exhaustion; everything swam before her eyes, and she could not stand when Rudolf lifted her from Miranda's back, and the Hausfrau came running, questioning, and exclaiming. Rudolf took her in his arms and carried her to the guest chamber, where he put her by

the side of the great stove, which had been lit ever since the party set out to bring her home. The landlady had all sorts of warm things ready, and was full of sympathy and interest, rolling out a perfect string of "*Ja wohl*," in every accent of amazement. After food had revived Wanda a little, sleep was evidently the needful restorative, and Rudolf left her with sanguine hopes that the morning would find her herself again.

He went early to see after Hans, who was recovering, though not yet fit to move, and evidently astonished at the greeting he received from the young Baron. He showed a strong dislike to hearing anything said about himself, but that the Fräulein was safe was no doubt relief, and he listened intently to all that Rudolf had to tell. The latter would have said more, but that he fancied whatever was done for Hans would come more agreeably to him through another channel; he contented himself, therefore, with leaving directions for getting him to Lauterthal on the following day, if that were possible, and went back to the Waldhaus.

A message met him that Wanda was anxious to start when he could be ready; and as soon as the sleigh with its tinkling bells was heard, she came down, looking very white but brilliantly happy. Miranda and her groom had already set off; Oscar was wait-

ing, and adding his deep barks to the hearty good wishes which followed the young couple as they drove away. There was a bright sun, the snow was hard and crisp, the sleigh dashed merrily along to the jangle of its bells, the colour came back to Wanda's cheeks, her eyes were sparkling—never was there such a drive! They had plenty to say to each other, but sometimes there were sweet silences which said more than all.

By-and-by the Schloss was mentioned.

"I am jealous," said Rudolf. "You learned to love them first." What his tone expressed was immense satisfaction.

"If it had not been so, I should never have consented now. I should have been too mistrustful," said Wanda simply.

"Mistrustful? *Liebchen*, you ought to know what the world will say, and say truly, that it is I who gain everything."

"If we each gain a heart, that is impossible," she said, looking round at him and blushing a little. "We will not think about the less or more if we are both happy; otherwise plenty would be said to make me doubt, for the world will really be more shocked at your marrying beneath you than at anything else."

"It is a pity it did not see me teaching German."

"Yes," she agreed, still looking at him and apparently pondering something. Whatever it was, she broke a short silence by saying mischievously: "Have you really learnt not to mind?"

"I think so."

"Ah, then I shall begin to believe I am forgiven."

"For what?"

"For helping you out of the river."

Rudolf laughed.

"Was I such a brute? Yes; I acknowledge I objected to being thought ridiculous. Be magnanimous in your turn, and confess that you were very rude to laugh."

"It was because I was so horribly frightened."

"Oh!"

"I was. The current looked so strong, and poor Miranda struggled so violently——"

"And then?"

"Then I suppose came a little reaction, and I was angry with myself for having been frightened, and——"

"And so you laughed? Well, you never let me see that you were frightened."

"No? Well, men are not very quick," Wanda said demurely.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Frau Jacob had talked over all possible household matters with Rosa's old mother, had looked at the pickled vegetables and the dried apples, and thus exhausted the Wildberg resources, she went back to the room where she had left Frau Schmidt, and found her gazing out of window.

"Dear heaven, is there anything to see!" she exclaimed, hastening to her side.

"It is most extraordinary what can have become of her," said Frau Schmidt in a tone of vexation, "or where she can have gone in this weather; but I am certain she has not returned to the house, for I must have seen her. Besides, I have been up to her door to listen, and there was nothing."

"Is Wanda out? The girl is quite uncivilised."

"She never will marry, for men dread strong-minded women."

"Well, she will suffer for her imprudence, and it is not my fault," said Frau Meyer calmly. "What apples they grow in this place! In future I mean

to be better supplied, for no one knows what the drying costs me, and I must say it is hard to come to this barbarous climate and find better fruit."

Frau Schmidt, who had not paid much attention, and whose thoughts were curiously occupying themselves with Wanda, assented, but added, "It surprises me to hear that pears should grow so finely in so bleak a place."

"Pears!" repeated the other, affronted, "who has said a word about pears! I must say you are extraordinarily ignorant on some matters. Pears! is it probable!"

"How foolish of me! But then I have not your practical knowledge. If you knew how often you remind me of the beloved Stadtdirectorin! She had the same talents, and would so often say 'My good Schmidt, you are the best of women, but a poetical soul does not agree with housekeeping.' In face, also, you so much resemble her!"

"So? Ah, I do not aspire to be Stadtdirectorin," said Frau Meyer, looking pleased, "but one thing certainly should be ours, the *Von*, and I shall not rest until Jacob obtains it. Gottfried might have had it if he had possessed any common sense; he was, however, perfectly idiotical on such matters. But now that he is at the bottom of the sea"—his

sister-in-law heaved a sigh which certainly breathed rather relief than sorrow—"you will see that things will be very different. Frau von Meyer, of Rothwald. It sounds well, does it not?"

"Beautiful! Will that ever be?"

"You will see. I wonder how many servants one must keep there. If you had got into the kitchens you might have helped me to calculate."

"Would Wanda ever consent?" asked Frau Schmidt with curiosity.

Her companion frowned angrily.

"What has Wanda to say to it? She will go where we take her. Do you suppose I should allow her an opinion?"

"Where can she be now? Look at the snow."

"Yes, it lies thick. I have ordered snow pancakes to-day, which will save eggs."

By-and-by, as the snow became more persistent, and Wanda did not return, Frau Schmidt began to feel real alarm, and at the risk of offending Frau Meyer, suggested that some one should be sent in search, receiving the answer that there was no one to go unless she undertook the task herself, and for such an attempt both her sympathies and courage were far too feeble. But as the hour for the mid-day dinner arrived and no Wanda made her ap-

pearance, Frau Jacob began to be conscious, if not of anxiety, at any rate of astonishment, and a little uneasiness. She recalled the girl's inquiries as to their return to Lauterthal, and aware of her daring nature, the possibility of her making some rash attempt to reach it at last suggested itself. This became certainty, though mixed with more astonishment, when she sent for the hunchback and learnt that he, too, was missing. The astonishment consisted in the fact that he should have abetted Wanda, for they had always supposed him to be not disinclined to do her or her father an ill turn, and Jacob had believed he could not have found a less amenable attendant to send to Wildberg. It was quite inexplicable to Frau Meyer, and she was very angry, repudiating the idea that harm could happen to Wanda, but convinced that by dint of obstinate determination the girl would reach Lauterthal, and certainly cause her uncle a vast amount of annoyance. If she were really to apply to the other trustees and hinder the foreclosure of the mortgage, Rothwald might after all slip through their fingers. Such a notion was too much for Frau Jacob's temper. She snapped all round, sent Rosa away crying, and plainly informed Frau Schmidt that she considered her a silly woman, setting up for feelings which did not exist. She

even—and this showed the state of her mind—once sneered at the Stadtdirectorin.

Under these circumstances the hours dragged wearily along. Frau Schmidt, who began to feel her position more uncomfortable than she could bear, and was indignant at her companion's hard-heartedness, grew sulky, fetched a pale blue volume of poems she had brought from Lauterthal, and ostentatiously wiped away a tear whenever Frau Meyer looked in her direction. Frau Meyer on her part walked restlessly about the room; the wind howled and shook the old house, darkness fell, it was altogether the most gloomy evening imaginable; and when the two women separated, it was with the strained sensation of finding a difficulty in keeping back outward expressions of resentment.

"The woman is a barbarian," Frau Schmidt said indignantly to herself, as she fastened the door of her bedroom, and looked to see that the stove was well supplied with wood, and that all her creature comforts were about her. "She cared nothing when poor Herr Gottfried was drowned, and I verily believe would be rather pleased to hear no more of this unfortunate girl—and nothing more will be heard—seen, at least. I wonder how the news will reach us. Perhaps first in the newspapers. 'Mysterious and terrible discovery'—how

thrilling it will be. It is even possible I may be called upon to bear witness, as having been the last to see her, and I am sure I can truly say my heart misgave me, otherwise why should I have felt so much interest, and remained watching so long at that cold window? Ah, no one will ever know how much I have endured, for it is a real misfortune to have a heart so delicately susceptible. Poor Wanda! Certainly, like her aunt, she was deficient in feeling, but one should not blame the dead, rather recall their beautiful qualities. How well she looked this morning in her furs! I shall not sleep all night for thinking of her. It is terrible that nothing should have been done. I am determined not to have that reproach on my head, so though I shall hear the wind so much more, I shall certainly open the shutters and set a light in the window. Then I, at any rate, shall feel that I have done all that was possible, whatever may be wanting in others."

With which heart-consoling reflection Frau Schmidt retired to rest, and slept soundly under her *duvet*, although she ever after averred that she did not once close her eyes.

Although she was not the woman to betray them, it need not be supposed that Frau Meyer was free from remorse and forebodings of over-

hanging calamity. Who but she and her husband had driven Wanda to this mad step, out of which could only come disaster, perhaps death? How could she lie and listen to the roar of the storm, believe that the girl might be exposed to it, and turn peacefully to sleep? It was she who really lay awake, tossing, and clasping her hands over her ears, although she never let it be known, and in the morning spoke as unconcernedly as ever.

However, the good accord between the companions was undoubtedly broken. Frau Schmidt would put up with much when it brought her the good things of this life in proper succession. But such a place as Wildberg had scarcely entered her conceptions; no society, no *Kaffees*, no regular cook. The treatment of Wanda ruffled her sentimentality, the cinnamon cake was heavy, and altogether she was moved to a condition of rebellion, under the influence of which she grew sulky, and declined to make the Stadtdirectorin or any other of her puppets dance.

Conversation, therefore, either became acrid or languished. Frau Schmidt sighed, wiped her eyes, and threw mournful glances towards the window, as she rehearsed to herself the soul-convincing words in which she would describe to the officers

of inquiry her feelings as she watched the spot where Wanda had vanished, and pictured the profound impression she would make. It was not impossible that there might be an official among them, not too young, perhaps a widower, who might be so touched by her tenderness of heart that—who knew? Stranger things had been known to happen, and Frau Hauptpolizeidirectorin would be a very honourable title.

No news came to Wildberg. Frau Meyer sent the old man, Rosa's father, to the near cottages to see if he could find some one to go through the forest, but the drifts lay deep, and there was no able-bodied man at home. She paced up and down her room, angrily miserable, longing to hear from her husband, and hunted by anxieties, by the gloom of disappointment and the fear of the unknown. Before the day was over the two companions had quarrelled violently, and Frau Schmidt contrived to make her reproaches sting. That night Frau Jacob did not go to her bed at all.

The next day a bright and clear sun shone out, and added to the fret of impatience, since it seemed impossible that things should look so much their ordinary selves and yet that no news should have arrived. Rosa was sure that Karl Fürst would bring the letters, if no accident had happened to

him. But once before in such a storm a letter-carrier had fallen a victim.

"Oh, Heavens! my poor Wanda!" exclaimed Frau Schmidt, lifting hands and eyes.

Frau Meyer looked angrily at her.

"You need not be so ready to kill my niece," she said stiffly; "it will be time enough for you to mourn when you have reason to believe that she is dead."

"And what reason have you for believing otherwise?" demanded the other with some promptitude. "Ah, the unhappy child!"

"If you are so much afflicted, it might be better for you to retire to your room," said her exasperated companion.

But this did not suit Frau Schmidt, who found herself warmer where she was, and she subsided into silence and an occasional deep sigh, which worked like a file on Frau Jacob's nerves. Although she now and then broke into angry storms, remorse, anxiety and fear were gradually cowing her spirit, so that she had fits of trembling, and began to dread being left alone, and to feel even Frau Schmidt's presence a protection. She was overwhelmed, not so much with what she had done, as with terror of what would be said of her, and wrote sheets to her husband in which she told him what

to say, and contradicted it again, and became pitiable in the abjectness of her fear. She dared not face another night alone, and took Rosa to her room; the girl came out in the morning pale and trembling, and told her mother she could not go through such hours again, for Frau Meyer had been like one mad. In fact conscience was using her scourges pretty freely.

Rosa had the compensation of hearing the first news from Karl Fürst, who was her betrothed, and who brought by word of mouth the account of Wanda's wonderful escape, and how the day before she had driven away from the Waldhaus with the young Baron who had found her in the hut. But Frau Meyer was not to be set upon her old pinnacle again by this news, for the letter Karl carried was from her husband, and told her that Gottfried was back again, and he himself a fugitive; in fact, at one blow, knocked all her ambitious designs on the head, and left her a mark for the finger of scorn.

She read the letter silently, crushed it in her hand, and sat still, staring blankly before her.

Frau Schmidt saw that something strange had happened, and her curiosity rose to burning point, so that she put innumerable small questions, and got nothing in return except at last the words—"Gottfried Meyer has come back." But these cer-

tainly were strange enough, and very welcome, as from the sighs she had bestowed upon Wanda's fate, she had grown to consider herself her defender, and to feel that a debt of gratitude was owing to her for disinterested affection. And as she was certain that now Herr Meyer's eyes would be opened to the real character of his sister-in-law, she congratulated herself very warmly and determined to make her disapproval the plainer. This proved, however, difficult, for Frau Meyer all day seemed like one stunned, words and innuendoes producing no impression, or apparently so much as reaching her ear. She ate and drank, and went about the house, even gave orders for having things ready to leave Wildberg, but her actions were like the mechanical movements of an automaton, and Frau Schmidt had never the satisfaction of feeling that her own words stung, and was sure that some great shock had been administered, though what it was she could not imagine. She was beyond measure sick of Wildberg, and longing to return to Lauterthal.

The directions for this came the next day in two brief lines from Herr Meyer, merely saying that a sleigh would fetch them within two or three hours. All through the journey Frau Jacob's heavy brooding continued; she showed no emotion or disturbance

until the station of Lauterthal was reached. Then she appeared struck with a sudden fear of recognition, looked hastily from left to right, walked with great rapidity to the carriage and buried herself in the corner, as if shrinking from the view of passers-by. Frau Schmidt on the contrary sat forward, with an air of great contentment and triumph.

The next day Wanda and her father were at the Schloss. The Baron and Herr Meyer were out in the grounds, wrangling over some improvements or changes which Herr Meyer considered indispensable, and the Baron abominated. The others were in Madame de Beaumont's room; the young girl sitting by her chair, the Baroness peacefully knitting, Rudolf half standing, half resting on the table behind him, his eyes fixed upon Wanda with that directness which Celia had once remarked as peculiar. She had been speaking a little, and her cheeks were flushed. Madame de Beaumont said with a quick sigh:

"I suppose I shall never altogether understand, but it is evident that our little Wanda has done something very fine, though why——"

The Baroness looked up and shook her head.

"She is too daring. Wanda knows that I scold her for letting her impetuosity run away with her. But now I shall take her in hand, and we shall see.

She will settle down to a right good housewife. The first thing to be done is to begin a book for recipes, and that I shall at once prepare."

Wanda started up and ran to the door. She had heard her father's step, and he came in, looking older, thinner, and graver; but his eyes filled with pleasure as he looked at her, and he put his arm round her, and stood thus in the middle of the room.

"So my little one has already found a nest here," he said, in a full voice. "See here, Frau Baronin, she has no mother."

"She is already my daughter."

"And has a blind grandmother into the bargain," said Madame de Beaumont gaily, and stretching out her hand.

"So!" he repeated, looking round him contentedly. "It seems that sometimes the best thing one can do is to get out of the way." But as Wanda cried out "No, no!" and clung to him, he stooped down, kissed her heartily, and put her hand into Rudolf's. "There, take her away," he said. "The betrothal may be as soon as you like."

"*Bitte sehr*, sit down," said the Baroness, pointing to a chair beside her, and going on with her knitting, "and let us hear how you are arranging

your household. Wanda says you have dismissed Frau Schmidt."

"Yes," he said sternly.

"She was certainly sentimental and affected."

"She was untrue all through," he said. "Untrue to my poor Wanda, and then to my unfortunate sister-in-law."

"And Frau Jacob remains with you?" said Madame de Beaumont with some wonder.

"Where is she to go? Besides, she is too ill to be moved."

"Herr Meyer," said the old lady brightly, "I foresee that I shall disagree with all your opinions, and that we shall fall out on every possible occasion; but previously I should like to tell you that I think you are a very generous man, and that I have often misunderstood you."

"Ah, madame," he said, with a laugh, "you intend to disarm me before the fight."

Rudolf had drawn Wanda into the window, which looked westward, and where their backs were turned to the others. If he had much to say, he left his eyes to speak, and their language must have satisfied her, for her cheeks glowed, and the sweet curve of her lips told of perfect contentment. But at last he said in a low voice:

"Heart's-beloved, does it not seem strange that

it should have taken so much to bring us together, as it were against ourselves."

"And that once I should have said no, when my father asked me what his answer to the Baron was to be," said Wanda smiling.

"But now?"

For reply she lifted her eyes to his, and let him read what he wanted there—the full gift of love, the yes to his questioning looks. Then hand in hand they stood and watched the sunset. A few dark, vapourish clouds lay above the woods, behind them stretched infinite seas of glowing light, golden green broken by layers of mottled clouds of tender rosy red. Higher up, on the paler ground of the sky, these same clouds melted into vast ribbed circles which might have been the sands of this ocean of light; and farther off and fainter still, with shreds of vapour flying across it, rode the cold calm crescent of the moon.

THE END.

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